‘[I am] unable to refuse the call of these pages to be scribbled in’: The Function of First World War Life-Writing

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ABSTRACT

'[I AM] UNABLE TO REFUSE THE CALL OF THESE PAGES TO BE SCRIBBLED IN': THE FUNCTION OF FIRST WORLD WAR LIFE-WRITING

Drawing on a diverse collection of both published and unpublished First World War diaries and letters, this thesis investigates the role of composition in war, examining the ways in which the act of writing itself—imposing narrative order on chaotic experience—functions in creating, securing, and repairing one's multiple identities in war. Indeed, through narration, the individual can connect to, challenge, or reconfigure, the war's prescribed social scripts—of soldier, nurse, spouse, parent, and/or patriotic citizen. This process or writing, and thereby re-asserting, one's identity was a fundamental component of men and women's emotional survival. In the midst of the First World War's chaos, life-writing held heightened significance on both home and battlefront. The diary and letter were appropriate generic vehicles through which men and women could express and negotiate the new facets and fragments of self; they were also sites where different social scripts could be tried and rehearsed, and venues for the navigation of war's trauma, suffering, and grief. Through the act of writing, the individual imposes some level of control over this otherwise chaotic experience. The 'I' on the page—whatever the length or descriptive quality of the words that surround it—is an assertion of the individual in a culture of sweeping propagandist claims, mass movement, and mass death. By putting pen to paper, the newly enlisted man could attempt to navigate the seemingly rapid transition from ordinary civilian to heroic soldier; the home front mother could confess fears and frustrations on the diary page, in turn mitigating grief and navigating the sense of self—as mother, as wife, as patriotic citizen—in the face of loss; from his trench, the frontline combatant could find distraction and escape through writing a letter home. The civilian man, in turn, could seek refuge in the diary's pages—his search to secure and validate alternate forms of 'manliness' often being particularly fraught.

Chapters:

For my incredible parents,

David and Ruth Martin

'[I AM] UNABLE TO REFUSE THE CALL OF THESE PAGES TO BE SCRIBBLED IN': THE FUNCTION OF FIRST WORLD WAR AND LIFE-WRITING

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INTRODUCTION

'[I AM] UNABLE TO REFUSE THE CALL OF THESE PAGES TO BE SCRIBBLED IN': THE FUNCTION OF FIRST WORLD WAR LIFE-WRITING[1]

On 28 April 1915, at the end of a particularly frantic shift in the hospital's operating room, nurse Elsie Fenwick writes in her diary:

> so busy, no time to think. We've got a man with a bullet in his brain and he lies all day unconscious and they are leaving him to see what happens. Another had his leg cut off at the hip joint today. I had to hold him. They cut him just as if he was a joint of meat. Dr. Depage is a butcher, but he did it as well as possible. Another with a bullet in his neck. It's awful, and they call us civilised.[2]

At 11 P.M. on 1 February 1917, having returned from the forward observation post, Coningsby Dawson writes a frank letter to his father:

> It seems brutal to say it, but taking pot-shots at the enemy when they present themselves is rather fun. You watch your victims through your glasses as God might His mad universe. Your skill in directing fire makes you what in peace times would be called a murderer. Curious! […]. I had to go forward again to guide in some guns […]. As far as the eye could see every yard was an old battlefield; beneath the soft white fleece of snow lay countless unburied bodies. […]. All the way I asked myself why was I not frightened? What has happened to me? […].[3]

On 28 October 1916, Phillis Kelly receives a telegram informing her that her fiancée has been 'Dangerously wounded'. Her response is to write him a letter:

> I wonder why I am writing this, which you may never see—Oh god […]. [T]his knowing nothing is terrible, I don't know what to do. […] [B]ut I must be brave and believe all will be well—dear one, surely God won't take me from you now. It will be the end of everything that matters because, oh Englishman, you are all the world and life to me. But I must be brave like you, dear […]. I tried very hard to pray but no words will come into my head, except 'Oh God, give him back to me.' This writing is the only thing that makes the waiting easier'.[4]

In each of these moments, the war's extreme conditions pose a threat to identity, to orderly thought, and to written expression. As men are reduced to parts and pieces amid the rapid and relentless movement of the operating theatre, the nurse is rendered exhausted and helpless; her professional

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[1] Charles May, diary, 22 December 1915, *To Fight Alongside Friends: The First World War Diaries of Charlie May*, ed. by Gerry Harrison (London: Harper Collins, 2014), p. 50.
[2] Elsie Fenwick, diary, 28 April 1915, *Women in the War zone: Hospital Service in the First World War*, ed. by Anne Powell (Stroud: The History Press, 2009), p. 134.
[3] Coningsby Dawson, letter, 1 February 1917, *Khaki Courage: Letters in War-Time*, ed. by W.J. Dawson (London: John Lane, 1019), pp. 160-161.
[4] Phillis Kelly, letter, 28 October 1916, *Love Letters from the Front*, ed. by Jean Kelly (Dublin: Marino Books: 2000), p. 284.

identity is troubled by the strain of her position as both witness to, and participant in, men's profound suffering; she becomes the 'butcher's' assistant— 'I had to hold him'. The soldier, temporarily removed from the warzone, is brought to confront the jarring disjunction between his past and present selves; the moral and non-violent man in peace becomes, in war's culture, the gleeful and skilled 'murderer'. His sense of dislocation, of fracture, is palpable; 'why was I not frightened? What has happened to me?' The home front woman, in turn, is caught in 'the havoc grief unleashes'; unable to know if she is betrothed or bereaved, she struggles amid multiple public scripts—religious, military, romantic—in attempting to navigate the impending loss of 'all the world'.[5] Her only comfort is the written page: '[t]his writing is the only thing that makes the waiting easier'. Indeed, in each of these moments of profound disruption, dislocation, and fracture, the individual turns to the written page. In the context of war's chaos, the diary or letter can become a place of refuge, a site of self-reflection and navigation, confession and cathartic release.[6] As written expression imposes order on experience, the individual's multiple roles and identities—personal and professional, civilian and combatant, pre-war and present—can be re-shaped, repaired, or reclaimed. Speaking of the diary, Felicity Nussbaum writes that its private pages become 'necessary at the point when the subject begins to believe that it cannot be intelligible to itself without written articulation and representation'.[7]

Drawing on a diverse collection of both published and unpublished First World War diaries and letters, this thesis investigates the role of composition in war, examining the ways in which the

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[5] Joy Damousi, *The Labour of Loss: Mourning, Memory and Wartime Bereavement in Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999), p. 9.

[6] The word 'navigation' is here—and throughout the thesis—used broadly to refer to the process of self-exploration and/or discovery. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, among its many meanings, 'to navigate' refers to an individual's attempt and/or ability to 'find his/her way'—the exact destination and route are not always known. The collective pages of the diary, in this context, represent a kind of self-*journey*; they map the complex narrative routes taken in the ongoing creation and re-creation of one's various identities.

[7] Felicity Nussbaum, 'Toward Conceptualizing Diary', *Studies in Autobiography*, ed. by James Olney (New York: Oxford UP, 1988), p. 135.

act of writing itself—imposing narrative order on chaotic experience—functions in creating, securing, and repairing one's multiple identities in war. Indeed, through narration, the individual can connect to, challenge, or reconfigure, the war's prescribed social scripts—of soldier, nurse, spouse, parent, and/or patriotic citizen. This process of writing, and thereby re-asserting, one's identity was a fundamental component of men and women's emotional survival. In the midst of the First World War's chaos, life-writing held heightened significance on both home and battlefront. The diary and letter were appropriate generic vehicles through which men and women could express and negotiate the new facets and fragments of self; they were also sites where different social scripts could be tried and rehearsed, and venues for the navigation of war's trauma, suffering, and grief. Through the act of writing, the individual imposes some level of control over this otherwise chaotic experience. The 'I' on the page—whatever the length or descriptive quality of the words that surround it—is an assertion of the individual in a culture of sweeping propagandist claims, mass movement, and mass death. By putting pen to paper, the newly enlisted man could attempt to navigate the seemingly rapid transition from ordinary civilian to heroic soldier; the home front mother could confess fears and frustrations on the diary page, in turn mitigating grief and navigating the sense of identity—as mother, as wife, as patriotic citizen—in the face of loss; from his trench, the frontline combatant could find distraction and escape through writing a letter home. The civilian man, in turn, could seek refuge in the diary's pages—his search to secure and validate alternate forms of 'manliness' often being particularly fraught.

In these instances, writing is an act of both expression and control. '[A]s one writes about what happens and how one feels', argues Paul Rosenblatt, 'one is defining the situation and one's reactions. The act of defining may be seen as an act of controlling, delimiting and shaping one's

emotional expression'.[8] Psychology has long associated the expression and/or disclosure of traumatic events with relief and, to a certain extent, with healing. Breuer and Freud emphasized the importance of the 'talking cure' in relieving the symptoms of hysteria in their development of the cathartic method. Building on this foundational work, contemporary cognitive psychologists stress the fundamental significance of narrative in the development and maintenance of the individual's sense of self. 'Stories serve both a *mnemonic* and *performative* function', write Alan Stewart and Robert Neimeyer, 'consolidating a sense of who we are as the protagonists of our accounts, and scripting the ways we engage in our lives with others'.[9] In creating these accounts, we inevitably draw on social scripts; indeed, societal norms, values, and expectations, relating to gender, class, sexuality, and race, guide not only the stories we tell, but our actions and behaviours. In times of personal crisis, narrative—be it written or spoken—can aid in the reassertion and/or reshaping of an individual's identity in accordance with societal norms. The identity of the brave soldier, for example, can be reasserted on the written page through the writer's drawing on the language of heroic sacrifice, a script that provides meaning and value in the face of war's indiscriminate brutality. '[I am] sorry for the men who aren't here, for it's a wonderful thing to have been chosen to sacrifice and perhaps to die that the world of the future may be happier and kinder', writes one soldier in a 1917 letter.[10] Expression can facilitate a return to some sense of coherence, the innumerable facets of identity appearing, at least from the perspective of the individual, unified and ordered once more. In his multiple psycho-social studies, James W. Pennebaker directly connects the written expression of traumatic events to cathartic release. 'Linguistically labelling an event and its emotions', he argues, 'forces the experience to be structured. This structure promotes the assimilation and understanding

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[8] Paul Rosenblatt, *Bitter, Bitter Tears: Nineteenth-Century Diarists and Twentieth-Century Grief Theories*, (Minnesota: U of Minnesota P, 1983), p. 107.
[9] Alan E. Stewart and Robert A. Neimeyer, 'Emplotting the Traumatic Self: Narrative Revision and the Construction of Coherence', *The Humanistic Psychologist*, 29 (2001), p. 8. Italics in original.
[10] Coningsby Dawson, letter, 31 January 1917, *Khaki Courage: Letters in War-Time*, ed. by W.J. Dawson (London: John Lane, 1917), p. 158.

of the event and reduces the associated emotional arousal'.[11] His studies also revealed that other forms of artistic expression—dance and song—gave little benefit. *Words* were the fundamental source of reappraisal, reclamation, and reasserted control, more specifically, words that were used to create meaningful stories on paper. Writing then, in moments of chaos, can provide a medium through which to confront and, in some sense, give order to, that which poses a threat to identity. It can also provide a venue for the creation, performance, and ongoing maintenance of that identity, a fact long intuited by literary writers. 'A journal', writes Joyce Carol Oates, 'is the ideal place of refuge for the inner self because it constitutes a counterworld: a world to balance the other'.[12]

This is not to suggest, however, that the expression of threatening or traumatizing events is always beneficial, or always possible. As will be discussed later in the Introduction, it is not. Nor does it suggest that personal writing was the only, or even most significant, tool, or coping mechanism, used by men and women during the First World War. Rather, this study aims to highlight the life-writing genres as particularly fitting venues for the expression and navigation of war's chaos. As self-reflexive forms, furthermore, they allow for an examination of what Michael Roper has rightly highlighted as a consistently neglected area of First World War scholarship: 'the behaviour and emotional dispositions of individual men [and women]', as they attempt to negotiate the inherent contradictions and complexities of their multiple wartime roles—as heroic soldier, selfless nurse, stoic spouse, and patriotic citizen, among many others.[13] 'I always write more when we are having the most uncomfortable time', writes E.K. Smith in a letter to his mother' in October 1915.[14] 'Just beginning [a] new vol. of [my] diary', writes VAD nurse Dorothea Crewdson, 'How and

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[11] James W. Pennebaker, et al., 'Linguistic Predictors of Adaptive Bereavement', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 72.4 (1997), p. 864.
[12] Joyce Carol Oates, cited in Alexandra Johnson's *Leaving a Trace: On Keeping a Journal* (New York: Hachette Book Group, 2001), p. 43.
[13] Michael Roper, 'Between Manliness and Masculinity: the 'War Generation' and the Psychology Fear in Britain, 1914-1950', *Journal of British Studies*, 44.2 (2005), p. 345.
[14] 2nd Lieutenant Ernest Kennedy Smith, *Letters Sent from France: Service with the Artists' Rifles and The Buffs, December 1914 to December 1915* (London: J. Cobb, no date), p. 115.

where will it end?'.[15] 'Could you send me a diary[;] and as soon as possible', urgently requests Cecil Stockbridge in 1915.[16] '[I]t is a relief to my feelings to write it you', writes Lieutenant Wightman in a letter to his wife before his demobilization'.[17] In examining the diaries and collected letters (epistolarium) of over eighty men and women, written on both home and battlefront, this study will highlight the written page as a site of self-creation and self-reflection, navigation and distraction, confession and cathartic release. In doing so, it will underline the fluidity and multiplicity of men and women's identities in war, identities not solely characterized by disillusion, trauma, and breakdown, but also by resilience, adaptability, and balance—the latter being achieved, in part, through writing. In drawing largely on unpublished, archival material, written between 1914 and 1918, this thesis, in turn, aims to illuminate how the war was experienced, represented, and re-interpreted, *as it was being fought*. The largely post-war texts of well-known literary writes, such as Siegfried Sassoon and Mary Borden, for example, are therefore only occasionally interwoven, functioning as useful points of comparison; indeed, published in the post-war's cultural climate, their writing is inevitably coloured by dominant narratives of 'disillusion' and 'futility'. In contrast, for 'ordinary' men and women, writing in the midst of the war's chaos, the war's early ideals were not simply abandoned or broken. On the contrary, as we shall see, meaning and value, both for the war and for the individual's role within it, was constantly being sought, reframed, and reasserted.

Identity, in its multiple facets and fragments, is here conceptualized as an ongoing social reality, one derived from what cognitive psychologists call the 'defining community'.[18] It is from 'the recognitions and observations by others', argues Eric Leed, that we 'create[ ] categories of persona,

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[15] Dorothea Crewdson, diary, 4 October 1915, *Dorothea's War: A First World War Nurse Tells Her Story* (London: Phoenix, 2014), p. 52.
[16] C. Stockbridge, letter, IWM, Documents. 15796 (07/41/1).
[17] Lieutenant W.O. Wightman, letter, 19 January 1919, *Love Letters of the Great War*, ed. by Mandy Kirkby (Basingstoke and Oxford: Macmillan, 2014), p. 170.
[18] Michele Crossley, *Introducing Narrative Psychology: Self, Trauma, and the Construction of Meaning* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2000), p. 40.

simplifications, rigidities, masks, and veils which constitute the essence and reality of social being'.[19] In this poststructuralist conception, behaviour, and thus identity, is socially determined. What behavioural psychologists call 'social scripts' provide the 'blueprints for behaviour and […] guide both our actions and our understandings of events', asserts Joan Atwood.[20] They 'provide us with a general idea of how we are supposed to behave and what is supposed to happen'.[21] The individual is thus positioned in the role of 'actor', performing on a social 'stage'.[22] His/her successful performance of the society's scripts elicit the 'recognitions and observations' of others; we are, in turn, rewarded for acting in accordance with dominant scripts. 'So home I went each evening, with my rifle on my shoulder', writes one new recruit in his diary, '[a]s I walked through the streets people looked admiringly at me, and I felt more than ever pleased with myself'.[23] We are also, conversely, limited, and, in some cases, harmed by the rigidities and simplifications (and/or generalizations) of these scripts. Scripts relating to masculinity in wartime, for example, promote control, competitiveness, and stoicism, traits which, in practice, could bring bodily harm, and, which, in turn, demanded the stifling of other behaviours—the expression of fear and emotion, for example. While this is not a thesis in behavioural or cognitive psychology, script theory and its metaphors of theatre and performance are particularly useful to the study of life-writing. Indeed, the affinities between this behavioural theory and literary analysis present new avenues in the study of life-writing's function in war. On the pages of their letters and diaries, men and women thus, at different moments, write, create, navigate, rehearse, bolster, perform, and, at times, reject, various behavioural scripts, in order to both secure and authenticate their multiple wartime identities. The sense of

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[19] Eric Leed, *The Mind of the Traveler, From Gilgamesh to the Global Tourism* (New York: Basic Books, 1991), p. 264.
[20] Joan D. Atwood, 'Social Construction Theory and Therapy Assumptions', *Family Scripts*, ed. by Joan D. Atwood (New York: Taylor and Francis, 1996), p. 13.
[21] Atwood, 'Introduction', ibid., p. xvi.
[22] Script theory was first theorised by Silvan Tomkins (1911-1991), a behavioural psychologist who, drawing on the work of both Freud and Darwin, studied the relation between emotion (which he came to call 'affect') and personality formation.
[23] W.T. Colyer, diary/memoir, no date, IWM, Documents. 7256 (76/51/1), p. 330.

identity presented in these texts, therefore, is one ever-in-process, and one intimately connected to its social, cultural, and historical moment. As Virginia Woolf asserts in her essay 'A Sketch of the Past', we must 'consider what immense forces society bring to play upon each of us, how that society changes from decade to decade; and also from class to class; […] if we cannot analyse these invisible presences, we know very little of the subject […] [and] how futile life-writing becomes'.[24] In the sections that follow, I will first outline the multiple ways in which identity is particularly threatened in war. I will then highlight the various dominant public scripts that were readily available for men and women to draw on in their private narration and navigation of the war's rapid social change, violence, and grief. Finally, I will turn to a discussion of the generic conventions of the First World War diary and letter, outlining how the characteristics of each respective form aided in the construction, maintenance, and repair of identity on both home and battlefront.

I. 'War experience is nothing if not a transgression of categories'—The First World War's threat to, and fragmentation of, identity[25]

The First World War posed a threat to identity on both home and battlefront. Men and women were subject to profoundly new roles and changing expectations as conceptions of citizenship were reconfigured by the war's increasing demands for participation. From the war's outset, popular and political rhetoric insisted on the entire population's support and sacrifice. Indeed, a moral authority was constantly appealed to. Opening his campaign to 'Awaken' the country, Prime Minister Herbert Henry Asquith spoke fervently at Guildhall on 4 September of 'the duty of *every* Briton in [this] crisis'.[26] Addressing the congregation at St. Gregory's in Longton, the Bishop of Northampton similarly spoke of the 'strict obligation upon *every* citizen' 'to dedicate all that they had and all that

[24] Virginia Woolf, 'A Sketch of the Past', *Moments of Being*, ed. by Jeanne Schulkind (San Diego and New York, 1985), p. 80
[25] Eric Leed, *No Man's Land: Combat and Identity in World War One* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1979), p. 21.
[26] 'An Awakened Country', 4 September 1914, *The Times*. Emphasis added.

they were to the country's service'.[27] Such language altered the nature and form of citizenship, its demands for active participation and personal sacrifice creating new facets of identity that had to be navigated and accommodated. The continuation of one's pre-war life, its quotidian events, considerations, and values, were either no longer possible, or required alteration—and often, justification. This potentially brought about a form of personal crisis, of fragmentation, as pre-war vocations were challenged, if not invalidated, in the face of war's new roles. These new roles, and their demands for personal sacrifice, where rigidly divided along the lines of gender.

For the male citizen, the khaki uniform signified the highest form of masculine duty and sacrifice. The image of the soldier hero was positioned at the centre of the nation's search for a renewed sense of national identity. For the urban male in particular, the war was inescapable. '[N]owhere is there any topic but one—the War', declared *The Times* on 14 December 1914.[28] In London, khaki-clad figures could be seen walking down Oxford Street; parks were filled with drilling soldiers; trench digging was practiced behind Westminster Cathedral, while army horses were tethered in Green Park.[29] Each of these scenes—compounding pressures already emanating from posters, rallies, and speeches—undoubtedly triggered some form of internal struggle for some unenlisted men. '[I am] again perplexed as to what real duty is, to fight or stay at home [?]', confided one young man to his diary in early 1915.[30] The young civilian male's gender identity, in short, was threatened, as was his identity as patriotic and moral citizen. 'Will You Go or Must I?' demanded one Irish propaganda poster.[31] The jeering question, posed by a stern and beautiful young woman

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[27] 'The Citizen's Duty', 3 May 1915, *The Times,* p. 5. Emphasis added.
[28] 'England in Time of War', *The Times*, Monday, 14 December 1914, p.9.
[29] Ibid., p.9.
[30] Captain W.C.S. Gregson, diary, 23 March 1915, IWM, Documents. 7509 (75/104/1).
[31] Anonymous, 'For the Glory of Ireland', 1914, IWM, Q80367. It should be noted that the Irish Recruitment Campaign took place in a social and political context that was considerably different from the rest of the British Isles. Ireland's politics had been fundamentally shaped by long-standing debates surrounding Home Rule. The War Office, recognizing that it would not be advantageous for its Parliamentary Recruiting Committee to devise recruitment materials, would create a Central Recruiting Council for Ireland (Jim Aulich and John Hewitt, *Seduction or Instruction?: First World War Posters in Britain and Europe* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2007).

who points to a burning Belgium in the background, sends a blatant message: the unenlisted man is not only cowardly, but effeminate; his weakness threatens the possibility of a gender reversal. As argued by Nicoletta Gullace, 'within the wartime vocabulary of gender definitions, men were those who protected; women those who required protection. Unenlisted men, existing among those who were being protected where ineluctably feminized by virtue of their place behind the line'.[32] Even men who were initially exempt from Kitchener's 'call to arms'—those who were married or above military age—were left to question their status as men. In her diary, Lillie Scales writes of her cousin's dying his hair, as he 'was very keen, and anxious, to get to France'.[33] As argued by Lois Bibbings, 'all men who were not of the military were, to varying degrees, excluded from exemplary notions of maleness'.[34] Indeed, the figure of soldier was positioned in public discourse as above all other forms of acceptable masculinity, including that of 'provider', for example. As written in *The Times* in March 1915, 'The khaki man is paramount. The civilian who remains a civilian for satisfactory reasons knows that he must take the lower room, and he yields with good grace, if with a little grudge'.[35] The internalization of this rhetoric, though to varying degrees, was inevitable. 'Perhaps I am a slacker', writes Harold Cossins, a married man with an ill wife in January 1916.[36]

While the masculine identity of the newly enlisted man was, for the time being, secure, the demands of military training, routine, and discipline, posed additional challenges. Once enlisted, a man's pre-war life, its relationships, its spaces, its daily routines, and its goals, had to be positioned as secondary to those of his new role. His concerns and duties as a father, husband, son, professional, and friend, in other words, had to be relegated. As the war dragged on, these domestic

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[32] Nicoletta Gullace, *The Blood of Our Sons: Men, Women, and the Renegotiation of British Citizenship During the Great War* (Bassingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p. 43.
[33] Lillie Scales, diary, 18 February 1917, *A Home Front Diary, 1914-1918* (Stroud: Amberley Publishing, 2014), p. 58.
[34] Lois Bibbings, 'Images of Manliness: The Portrayal of Soldiers and Contentious Objectors in the Great War', *Social and Legal Studies* 12.3 (2003), p. 336.
[35] 'The Cult of Khaki', *The Times*, 16 March 1915.
[36] Harold Cossins, diary, 6 January 1916, IWM. Documents. PP/MCR/371.

identities, would become, for some men, relics of a distant past. The war's prolonged separations, coupled with the widening experiential gap regarding the war's realities, could result in feelings of estrangement, not only from the people and places of the soldier's pre-war life, but also from his pre-war self. 'My adventures in the lakes seem very ancient now', writes G.R. Barlow in a letter to his aunt, 'most things that […] happened in England are now wrapped in the thick mists of age. I think that is the cause of the fed-up feeling'.[37] Feelings of isolation and estrangement, for some men, were compounded by the seemingly rapid changes that were happening at home, as women entered roles previously held by men—in factories, farms, train stations, and businesses. Indeed, the war's creation of new, and potentially liberating, roles and identities for women—as independent, and mobile, skilled professionals—presented an additional threat to male identity. If women could successfully do the work of men, then the presumably 'masculine' roles of skilled labourer and provider were placed in question. '[D]on't take on a man's job or go in a factory', writes an anxious George Wilby in a letter to his fiancée, 'I think it disgusting the way women are going on at home, when us chaps come [back] we shan't know the women from the men'.[38]

While arguably not to the same extent as civilian men—their manhood being of near-constant public discussion and debate—women's identities were too threatened by war. Indeed, women's roles and daily routines in peacetime would also be increasingly unsettled by the war's new demands and changing expectations.[39] '[T]his is the time when every woman in England is called upon to be brave and self-sacrificing', declared *Women's World* in September 1914.[40] As men's role as soldier was positioned as the highest form of sacrifice, many young women grew increasingly frustrated with their comparatively limited opportunities to contribute. 'Oh it's you that have the

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[37] G.R. Barlow, letter, 20 August 1916, IWM, Documents. 2755 (86/40/1).
[38] G.F. Wilby. letter, September 1917, IWM, Documents. 6823.
[39] The war's role in the lives of individual women was, of course, highly varied and dependent upon many factors—her age, social class, geographical location, etc.
[40] *Woman's World*, 19 September 1914, p. 271.

luck out there in the blood and muck', famously—and emblematically—writes Rose Macaulay in 'Many Sisters to Many Brothers'.[41] On 18 January 1915, the *Daily Sketch* reported receiving 'bundle[s] of letters' 'from girls who want to fight':

> One meets her at every turn, scornful of her knitting, bitter, even, as she reviews her progress in a superficial course of instruction in first aid to the wounded. 'What is the use of a great hulking creature like me sitting here rolling bandages and winding wool?' She demands. 'Why can't they let us train and do some real work?"[42]

Women's identities as patriotic citizens are here threatened by the limitations of their position as 'those requiring protection' in war. The feminine, domestic identity, in other words, conflicts with that of the self-sacrificing, patriotic citizen. Knitting and rolling bandages—while widely promoted activities for women in the war's early months—made few feel that they were 'dedicat[ing] all that they had and all that they were to the country's service'.[43] Rose Macaulay's *Non-Combatants and Others* provides a clear summary of female frustration: 'To have one's friends in danger, and not to be in danger oneself—it fills one with futile rage. Combatants are to be pitied; but non-combatants are of all men and women the most miserable. Older men, crocks, parsons, women—God help them'.[44]

Women's identities as both mothers and wives were also challenged by the war's demands. Public discourse celebrated the Patriotic Mother and Waiting Woman, both of whom willingly, and selflessly, sacrificed their men to the nation's cause without hesitation or complaint. 'Women of Britain say "Go!"' declares the famous 1915 recruitment poster.[45] By sending your sons to war 'with a faith that only a mother can instil […] you are as much fighting as are your soldier and sailor sons', reassures the editorial of *Mother and Home*.[46] This rhetoric, equating maternal self-sacrifice with

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[41] Rose Macaulay, 'Many Sisters to Many Brothers', *Poems of To-day: An Anthology* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1916), p. 24.
[42] 'Girls who want to be in the fighting line', *Daily Sketch*, 18 January 1915, p. 2.
[43] 'The Citizen's Duty', 3 May 1915, *The Times*. Emphasis added.
[44] Rose Macaulay, *Non-Combatants and Others* (1916; London: Methuen, 1986), p. 144.
[45] E.P. Kealey, 'Women of Britain say "GO!"', 1915, Parliamentary Recruiting Committee Poster No. 75, IWM, Art. PST 2763.
[46] 'To the Mothers of Britain', *Mother and Home*, 5 September 1914, p. 425.

military duty, also worked simultaneously to silence feelings of dissent. Indeed, a mother and/or wife who tried to dissuade her son or husband from enlisting was deemed unpatriotic. 'Dear Lassie', 'how wrongly you are behaving', admonishes one editor in her response to a letter received from a woman 'torn to pieces with grief and sadness' at the thought of her sweetheart's enlistment. 'Instead of imploring your sweetheart to shirk his duty, you should have done your best to urge him to fulfil [it] in the spirit of a true British soldier […]. [We must] cheer our dear ones—husbands, sweethearts, fathers, and brothers—and send them off to their calling with brave, noble hearts'.[47] One facet of publically endorsed Womanhood—that of nurturer, care giver, and life-giver—is thereby brought into conflict with one of the war's primary behavioural scripts for home front women, that of moral and self-sacrificing patriot, for whom (and whose body) the nation's men fight to honour and protect. Women's internalization of this rhetoric is clear on the pages of many letters and diaries. [I] can't help feeling depressed […]. [I]t makes my heart feel fit to burst but I really must buck up [for] you', writes Edith Bennett in a letter to her soldier husband.[48]

While the war's rapid and immense social changes undoubtedly posed challenges to the home front identities of both male and female civilians—as patriotic citizens, as professionals, as moral men and women—its most profound and most threatening challenge was, without question, found on the battlefront, and, more specifically within its frontline trenches and hospitals. Indeed, the deprivation, monotony, violence, and trauma of these chaotic spaces would, for some, efface identity. Trauma theorists such as Cathy Caruth argue that traumatic experience 'overwhelms [one's] ability to assimilate', resulting in the self-protective repression of memory.[49] This 'leads to a denial or severe inhibition of the process whereby individuals construct their sense of successive selves by

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[47] 'Heart to Heart Chats', *Women's World*, 19 September 1914, p. 271.
[48] Edith Bennett, letter, 27 September 1917, contained within the Private Papers of E.S Bennett (combatant), IWM, Documents. 3695 (96/3/1).
[49] Cited by Linda Anderson, *Autobiography*, (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 127-28.

reference to the remembered past.[50] '[T]he traumatic history', writes Linda Anderson, 'cannot become integrated into the subject's narrative or history of themselves'.[51] For the soldier, the alien and uncanny world of the trenches could be profoundly traumatizing and dehumanizing. In the midst of their extreme conditions, even the most fundamental boundaries break down. As argued by Eric Leed,

> War experience is nothing if not a transgression of categories. In providing bridges across the boundaries between the visible and invisible, the known and the unknown, the human and the inhuman, war offered numerous occasions for the shattering of distinctions that were central to orderly thought, communicable experience, and normal human relations. Much of the bewilderment, stupefaction, or sense of growing strangeness to which combatants testified can be attributed to those realities of war that broke down what Mary Douglas calls "our cherished classifications".[52]

These realities posed an extreme challenge to conceptions of masculinity and male identity in war. Those who imagined entering roles of definitive action, roles of 'wonderful coolness and daring', as asserted by *The Daily Telegraph*, were very often rendered prone and passive in the face of bombardment.[53] Furthermore, as the death-toll mounted, and as men's time at the front dragged on, the meaning and value of the war, along with one's role within it, could become increasingly obscure. This loss of meaning would, for some, result in a loss of identity.

The professional identity of the nurse was also met with frequent challenge on the front. And indeed, she too experienced breakdown, though to a lesser extent than the combatant.[54] In the midst of the hospital's chaos, it was vital that medical staff—both women and men—remain calm, efficient, and steadfast. Personal feelings, emotions, and discomforts had to be stifled and/or contained in the face of men's often extreme suffering and pain. '[A]n ideal nurse has the very rare instinct of self-forgetfulness. […] [H]er senses wait on him first and herself afterwards', writes H.C.

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[50] M. Pickering and E. Keightley, 'Trauma, Discourse, and Communicative Limits', *Critical Discourse Studies* 6.4 (2009), p. 238.

[51] Anderson, *Autobiography*, pp. 127-28.

[52] Eric Leed, *No Man's Land: Combat and Identity in World War One* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1979), p. 21

[53] Anonymous, 'British Army at the Battle of Mons', *The Daily Telegraph*, 26 August 1914, p. 7.

[54] The nurse's professional identity was also challenged by the presence of comparatively untrained VADs on the front. The tensions arising from this professional conflict, including those relating to class, are discussed in Chapter Four.

O'Neill and Edith A. Barnett in *Our Nurses and the Work They Have to Do*.[55] This professional demand for stoicism, compounded by popular images of the nurse as self-sacrificial heroine, placed her in a profoundly complex subject position. The trauma she witnessed, especially during major battles, could seem relentless, making it necessary for her to dissociate in order to function. This psychological dissociation, while potentially manifesting physically as a calm and professional exterior, was a coping mechanism, which generally involved some form of emotional separation, detachment, or numbing.[56] In their book, *Working in a World of Hurt: Trauma and Resilience in the Narratives of Medical Personnel in Warzones*, Carol Acton and Jane Potter rightly argue that '[t]he constant witnessing of trauma […] can result in a sense of unreality that allows the medic to sustain a necessary detachment in spite of the conditions'.[57] Mary Borden explores this form of dissociative detachment in her memoir, *The Forbidden Zone*: 'I think that woman, myself, must have been in a trance…Her feet are lumps of fire, her face is clammy, her apron is splashed with blood; but she moves ceaselessly about with bright burning eyes and handles the dreadful wreckage as if in a dream. She does not seem to notice the wounds or the blood'.[58]

The experience of losing countless patients—patients for which the nurse had no time to mourn—also posed a threat to her identity as a medical professional. Indeed, death in medical discourse is framed as failure, and yet, in war, a swift death is what the nurse frequently desires. '[T]he whole of the side of his face gone, his shoulder out, his arm broken and a wound on his leg. He died, thank goodness', writes Elsie Fenwick in her diary in 1915.[59] Compounding the nurse's

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[55] H.C. O'Neill and Edith A. Barnett, *Our Nurses and the Work They Have to Do* (London: Ward, Lock & Co., 1888), p. 17.
[56] In 'Dissociation in Trauma: A New Definition and Comparison with Previous Formulations', Ellert Nijenhuis and Onno van der Hart define dissociation in trauma as 'entail[ing] a division of an individual's personality, that is, of the dynamic, biopsychosocial system as a whole that determines his or her characteristic mental and behavioural actions'. (*Journal of Trauma and Dissociation* 12.4 (2001), p. 417).
[57] Carol Acton and Jane Potter, *Working in a World of Hurt: Trauma and Resilience in the Narratives of Medical Personnel in Warzones* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2016), p. 9.
[58] Mary Borden, *The Forbidden Zone* (London: Hesperus Press, 2008), p. 159.
[59] Mrs. Elsie Fenwick, diary, 12 May 1915, *Women in the War zone: Hospital Service in the First World War*, ed. by Anne Powell (Stroud: History Press, 2009), p. 135.

sense of failure was also her role within the 'war machine'. The men she is able to mend, are returned, not to safety, but to the front, possibly to die. This is the 'conspiracy' to which Mary Borden refers in *The Forbidden Zone*.[60] In this context, the meaning and value of her professional identity is repeatedly challenged. The compounding pressures placed on the nurse, in short, not entirely unlike that of the soldier, were multiple.

The threat war posed to identity on both home and battlefront was significant and multifaceted. For some, it brought into being new facets of identity, which had to be accommodated and negotiated, while for others it invalidated, and, ultimately, effaced. In seeking to both express and navigate the sense of self in the face of war's rapid social change, its violence, and its grief, men and women often turned to public discourses. Such discourses, subject to the dominant pro-war narratives, prescribed appropriate roles for men and women in war. In the section that follows, I will outline these discourses and the behavioural scripts they promoted.

II. 'A framework for thinkable thought': Public scripts and the construction of the private self in war[61]

In seeking to restore some form of order and control—to find a sense of wholeness amid the multiple selves that war brought into being—men and women frequently turned to readily available public scripts. This was particularly the case as the war's rapid change had rendered previously acceptable (and valued) roles inadequate. In wartime, what Judith Butler refers to as the 'regulatory power' of the state becomes more evident and more rigid; so too, in turn, does the individual's 'desire for social existence'.[62] Amidst war's profound social upheaval, men and women seek validation and confirmation of self; they seek, in other words, the stability offered by societal norms.

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[60] Mary Borden, 'Conspiracy', *The Forbidden Zone* (London: Hesperus Press, 2008), p. 79.
[61] Noam Chomsky, 'The Bounds of Thinkable Thought', *The Progressive* 49 (1985), p. 31.
[62] Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*: *Theories of Subjection* (Stanford: Stanford UP,1997), p. 19.

'Where social categories guarantee a recognizable and enduring social existence', writes Butler, 'the embrace of such categories, even as they work in the service of subjection, is often preferred to no social existence at all'.[63] In drawing on these public scripts, the individual contributes to their construction, thereby simultaneously participating in what Noam Chomsky refers to as the 'manufacture of consent'.[64] During the First World War, public discourse promoted a range of identities that provided appropriate behavioural scripts for men and women. These scripts, fundamental to ensuring participation and support, included that of the soldier, the waiting woman, the patriotic mother, and the nurse, among others. In the sections that follow, I will outline these identities and the scripts they provide and promote. It should be noted, however, that these dominant scripts were largely directed toward, and adopted by, the middle and upper-classes—the primary focus of this study. These identities, for example, were rooted in conceptions of sacrifice, which, as Janet Watson has rightly argued, was generally how those of higher, more leisured, classes viewed their contributions to the war. Men and women of the working populations, she asserts, most often viewed their war roles in term of 'work'.[65] It should also be noted that public scripts were rarely, if ever, wholly and simply followed, or performed. Indeed, as the diaries and collected letters examined here make clear, identity is multiple, flexible, and adaptable. An individual can adopt the characteristics of multiple 'dramatis personae', depending upon his/her audience. 'Properly speaking, a man has as many social selves as there are individuals who recognize him and carry an image of him in their mind', writes William James.[66] Each of these 'social selves', however, is nonetheless constructed in relation to dominant public scripts, whether in accordance or dissent.

'Autobiographers generally use rhetorical strategies to compare themselves to normative standards

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[63] Ibid., p. 20.
[64] Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (London: The Bodley Head, 2008**).**
[65] Janet S.K. Watson, *Fighting Different Wars: Experience, Memory, and the First World War in Britain* (Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 2004), p.4
[66] William James, *The Principle of Psychology, Volume 1* (1890; New York: Cosimo Book, 2007), p. 294.

and persuade readers that they embody at least some virtues […]', writes Diane Bjorklund.[67] This is why Vera Brittain, for example, in her diary, can, at times, uphold pacifist principles—condemning the war in general—and yet, at others, draw on the same language of heroic self-sacrifice that was publically encouraged in both the nurse and the patriotic waiting woman: '[Our lives] are bare of all but the few great things which are all we have left to cling to now—honour and love and heroism and sacrifice', she writes on 26 May 1915.[68] Individual men and women thus engaged with dominant scripts in multiple ways, at times taking them on, drawing on their language, while at others, challenging or rewriting them. I will turn now to an outlining of the war's dominant public scripts, scripts that were adopted, performed, negotiated, and, at times, eschewed on the diary and letter page, as men and women sought recognition and validation for their new wartime identities.

i. The Soldier

The most visible and highly valued behavioural script in war belonged to that of the soldier. Representing the highest form of manhood, in the war's early months, he was generally represented as moral, stoic, cheerful, self-sacrificing, and, above all, brave. He is a hero of 'wonderful coolness and daring', and an honourable and fearless protector of the nation's 'homes from distress'.[69] That bravery was a crucial element in his construction had been established by long-standing cultural, social, and educational influences. The public schools, for example, often celebrated the steadfast soldier who fearlessly performed his imperial duties, while popular boys' literature presented its masculine heroes as physically dominant athletes, full of 'pluck' and prowess. Indeed, the public-

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[67] Diane Bjorklund, *Interpreting the Self: Two Hundred Years of American Autobiography* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1998), p. 20.
[68] Vera Brittain, 26 May 1915, cited by Carol Acton, *Grief in Wartime: Private Pain, Public Discourse* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 28.
[69] 'British Army at the Battle of Mons', *The Telegraph,* 26 August 1914; Lloyd George, 'Speech delivered at Queen's Hall, London', September 19, 1914.

schooled recruit was undoubtedly well-educated in the language of duty, sacrifice, and bravery; he took for granted the honour and greatness of his country. His school syllabus celebrated past wars and military heroes, while his favourite writers presented danger and combat as sanctified opportunities for displays of courage and valour. In the words of one beloved George Alfred Henty character: 'Our duty is clear. God has sent us here to their aid, and whatever be the risk, we must run it'.[70] Drawing on this well-established and highly romanticized language, the war's dominant rhetoric constructed the soldier as the epitome of not only masculinity but male morality and civility. As public discourse increasingly drew on stories of German atrocities inflicted on Belgian women and children, soldering meant more than defending the nation, it meant defending one's *own* home and family from similar barbarity. Positioned against unrestrained German brutality then, the British soldier was chivalrous and controlled. As asserted by Nicoletta Gullace, 'As the case of Belgium was rhetorically elided with the potential invasion of Britain, the appeal to men's chivalry became part of a masculine ethic grounded in the protection of the British home'.[71] Public scripts, in short, presented the role of soldier as extremely desirable. Both his masculinity and morality were unquestionable; he was chivalrous, stoic, and brave, the rightful inheritor of his nation's heroic and victorious past. This script was undoubtedly highly appealing to the public-school man in particular—a primary focus of this study. Indeed, for Charles Carrington, when war was declared, '[T]here was no doubt what we ought to do'. To the seventeen-year-old, contemplating his Oxford scholarship exam, the war happily entwined 'inclination, actual necessity and the highest principles of conduct'.[72] The soldier's script offered an ideal of manliness; it offered honour, respect, and

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[70] George Alfred Henty, 'The Mate's Story', *Tales from the Works of G. A. Henty* (London: Blackie & Son, 1893), p. 7. Henty—honorary Vice-President of the Boy's Brigade—was among the most popular writers of boy's adventure stories, writing nearly eighty historical tales of 'manly' endeavour. His tales 'are so well known and widely appreciated', writes the book's publisher, that the introduction 'need be of the briefest'.

[71] Nicoletta Gullace, *The Blood of Our Sons*, p. 48.

[72] Charles Carrington, 'Introduction', *Rudyard Kipling: His Life and Work* (London: Macmillan, 1978), p. 7. Carrington, *Soldier From the Wars Returning* (1956; Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2006), pp. 46, 259.

adventure, and promised countless opportunities for displays of courage, physical prowess, and self-control.

ii. The Nurse

Not unlike the soldier's, the nurse's role was represented within public discourse as natural for women in wartime—it effectively carried women's peacetime scripts of nurturance, life-giving, and self-sacrifice to the battlefront. In other words, the nurse was frequently aligned with images of the conservative domestic deity—the patriotic mother. The conflation of the two figures is most clearly represented in the 1918 Red Cross recruitment poster by Alonzo Earl Foringer, entitled 'The Greatest Mother in the World'.[73] The image presents a large seated female figure, dressed in robes and gazing upwards, a red cross on her white veil. In her arms, she cradles a tiny wounded soldier. The image presents a strange rendition of the Madonna and Child—the nurse serving as the wartime mother to the nation's sacrificed sons. This association effectively functioned in maintaining the nurse's wartime work within a traditional, idealized value system, one that equated feminine duty with maternal self-sacrifice; 'Give generously and wholeheartedly, grudging nothing', wrote Katharine Furse in the letter that was 'to be kept in [the] pocket book' of every Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD) nurse.[74] The nurse's role, then, whether she was a trained professional or VAD, was often generalized in public scripts using very traditional language; in these scripts, asserts Carol Acton, she 'nurtur[ed]' the frontline soldier, and, at the same time, was given the opportunity 'to serve [her] country through work that purported to give them the kind of excitement offered to men'.[75] 'Defence of the nation was a man's job, and I unfortunately was a woman', writes VAD

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[73] Alonzo Earl Foringer, 'The Greatest Mother in the World', 1918, IWM, Art. PST 18095.
[74] Katharine Furse, 'Paper to VAD Members', IWM, Museum Administration Records, EN1/3/SER/015; can also be found at redcross.org.uk.
[75] Carol Acton, *Grief in Wartime: Private Pain, Public Discourse* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 24.

nurse Olive Dent, 'And yet the New Army of men would need a New Army of nurses'.[76] This idealized script, of course, did *not* include the hands-on realities of her role as healer. Nurse Shirley Marion ironically summarizes her internalization of these highly romanticized, and sanitized, scripts: 'I visualized myself […] aiding and comforting the wounded, or kneeling beside dying men in shell-torn No Man's Land […] gliding silently among hospital cots […] lifting bound heads to moisten pain-parched lips with water'.[77] The nurse's script, not unlike the soldier's, was thus as highly sanitized as it was idealized. Represented as the equivalent of the fighting man, the role offered women a script that would secure their identities as distinctly feminine, self-sacrificing patriotic citizens.

iii. The Patriotic Woman—the mother and the waiting woman

Among the First World War's widely-promoted dichotomies was the Victorian ideology of 'separate spheres'. Home Front female participation in war was very often represented as taking place largely within the home, a home that was both idealized and feminised, along with its inhabitants, being that which the heroic soldier fights to honour and protect. Positioned within this ideal home was the Patriotic Mother and/or Waiting Woman, both of whom are depicted as willing to selflessly sacrifice their men to the nation's cause without hesitation or complaint. They are then encouraged to 'do their bit' by providing cheerful support and encouragement to their serving soldiers, in turn, repressing any personal struggle in order to protect their morale. By sending your sons to war 'with a faith that only a mother can instil […] you are as much fighting as are your soldier and sailor sons', reassures the editorial of *Mother and Home*.[78] **'**[We must] cheer our dear ones—husbands, sweethearts, fathers, and brothers—and send them off to their calling with brave, noble hearts', advises *Women's*

[76] Olive Dent, *A VAD in France* (1916; London: Diggory Press, 2005), pp. 14-15.
[77] Shirley Millard, diary, cited by Carol Acton, *Grief in Wartime*, p. 136.
[78] 'To the Mothers of Britain', *Mother and Home*, 5 September 1914, p. 425.

World.[79] Such rhetoric, equating maternal self-sacrifice with military duty, also worked simultaneously to silence feelings of dissent. Indeed, a mother and/or wife who tried to dissuade her son or husband from enlisting was deemed unpatriotic. The script of the Patriotic Mother and/or stoic Waiting Woman offered a distinctly traditional, domestic, and passive role, one characterized by self-sacrifice and silence.

Of course, as is the case with all ideology, these identities—and the behavioural scripts they encourage and espouse—inevitably obscure the complexities of actual *lived* experience. In the midst of the war's extreme conditions, its separations, its violence, its unpredictability, and its death, performance of these scripts is often rendered impossible. In these instances, individuals often turn to the written page. Here the diary and letter are used to re-assert some sense of order and control. Having outlined the public scripts that were available for men and women to start with, I will now turn to the life-writing genres, outlining the ways in which they functioned as appropriate generic vehicles through which to express and negotiate the new facets and fragments of identity that the war created. I will also discuss how the genres were adapted as the war wore on, becoming tools for repair, navigation, and reclamation, beginning with the diary.

III. Life Writing in time of war—form, function, and theory

The Diary

In 'Spiritual Journals in France', Phillippe Lejeune defines the diary as 'a series of dated traces; that is, a practice of making notations extended over time'.[80] Temporality, then, for Lejeune, is vital to the diary's form and function. It is, as Jeremy Popkin argues, 'the only constraint on the diary that

[79] 'Heart to Heart Chats', *Women's World*, 19 September 1914, p. 271.
[80] Phillipe Lejeune, 'Spiritual Journals in France From the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Centuries', *On Diary*, ed. by Jeremy D. Popkin and Julie Rak (Manoa: U of Hawaii P, 2009), p. 62.

Lejeune accepts': "if writers do not date their entries, they are not keeping diaries".[81] While this defining element is at times vital in war, at others it is eschewed—the latter marking a potential generic separation between diary and 'war diary'. More generally speaking, once the basic physical conditions and required materials for writing are obtained—light, paper, a stable backing, pen and ink—the writing of the date at the top of a page 'paves the way for the personalization of the subject'.[82] This dating, in other words, allows for the writers' self-positioning in time, a positioning that is addressed not to a specific audience, but rather, crucially, to a future addressee—a future self, or imagined future reader. The letter's external and reciprocal dialogue is turned inward in the diary, where the relationship is between text, writer, and imagined future reader. It is for this imagined future reader that the diarist performs her/himself 'in time and through time', a performance that returns the private diary 'to the social world which informs it and to which it gives shape'.[83] These fundamental generic conventions of the diary—its link to temporality, its internalized addressee, and its performative nature—render it an apt generic vehicle through which the individual could express and navigate the new facets and fragments of self that were demanded and created by the war's rapid social and cultural change, its violence, and its trauma. In the sections that follow, I will outline how the diary's generic conventions function in war on both home and battlefront. For the purposes of clarity, they are divided under subheadings.

i. Temporality and self-re-creation

To the individual in war, the diary's blank page offers, first and foremost, a rare space of both freedom and refuge. The diarist can choose the style, tone, and content of his/her text. Its form, 'wide-ranging yet patterned', writes Suzanne Bunkers, can be adapted to suit different moods and

[81] Jeremy Popkin, 'Philippe Lejeune, Explorer of the Diary', *On Diary* (Manoa: U of Hawaii P, 2009), p. 6.
[82] Phillipe Lejeune, 'On Today's Date', *On Diary*, p. 80.
[83] Julie Rak, 'Introduction', *On Diary*, p. 24.

different needs.[84] 'One has so many different moods out here', writes one young soldier in September of 1916.[85] It allows for change and growth, its 'rhythm [being] that of discontinuity rather than of continuity', even as its writer seeks stability.[86] This freedom is granted, in part, by the diary's formal link to temporality—its conventional demand for the transcription of the day's date. In sectioning off each day, the date offers license to present the self in that particular moment—in time, in history, in space, while the blank page that follows allows for change and flexibility. Indeed, the diary, as a sequential but malleable form, invites the presentation of a self that is ever-in-process. The simple presence of the *next page* grants a particular freedom of expression by virtue of its repeated offering of new beginnings. The freedom of form and of expression the diary provides, a simple pleasure in peace, is made infinitely more precious in the midst of war's social chaos, wherein the needs of the many—the unit, the brigade, the community, the nation—must take precedence over that of the individual, and wherein the individual's actions—whether male and female—can be openly questioned and scrutinized, celebrated and vilified. 'Are YOU in this?' demanded one poster created by the Parliamentary Recruiting Committee in 1915'.[87]

In the war's early months, then, the diary page could function as a safe space, a rare private venue where the newly militarized self could be freely given shape and definition, a venue where different public scripts could be tried out and rehearsed—without fear of reprisal or judgment. After his enlistment with the Artist's Rifles in early 1914, W.T. Colyer, for example, turned to his diary. 'So the great deed was done, the contract with H.M. the King was signed, and I went home throbbing with a new vitality, as (I imagine) a man might who had just plighted his troth to the girl he had

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[84] Suzanne L. Bunkers and Cynthia A. Huff, eds., *Inscribing the Diary: Critical Essays on Women's Diaries* (Boston: The U of Massachusetts P, 1997), p. 1.
[85] G.R. Barlow, letter, 8 September 1916, IWM, Documents. 2755 (86/40/1).
[86] Julie Rak, 'Dialogue with the future: Phillipe Lejeune's method and theory of diary', *On Diary* (Manoa: U of Hawaii P, 2009), p. 24.
[87] Baden Powell, Robert S., 'Are YOU in this?', Parliamentary Recruiting Poster No. 112, 1915, IWM, Art. PST 2712.

loved at first sight'.[88] Drawing on highly literary, chivalric language, Colyer here casts himself in the role of romanticized masculine hero. Before departing for France, Voluntary Aid Detachment nurse Kit Dodsworth draws on similar language in describing her, also newly militarized, self. 'It was thrilling […], one felt so much a part of the "British Expeditionary Force", and I felt quite a little hero, or perhaps I should say, heroine'.[89] In these moments, the diary is a venue for private self-re-creation. The diarist can claim the new facets of him/herself through written expression, redrawing the self as a type—a hero or heroine.

Even amid the freedom of the diary's pages, however, there is tension. Indeed, Colyer and Dodsworth's early self-assertions are undoubtedly self-conscious ones. This subtle anxiety stems from the diary's assumed, or imagined, future reader, a reader whose spectre-like presence likely became more tangible, or at least more felt, to the diarist amid the period's frequent assertions that the war was a 'epoch-making' moment, one that made ordinary men and women 'players in history'.[90] By linking the war to those of the past, and, in turn, by claiming its massive influence on the future, the potential (or desire) for a future reader was, for some, more keenly felt. The *imagined* future reader, then, while generally allowing for greater freedom of expression then that of the letter's known audience, could nonetheless inspire similar self-censorship.

Lejeune locates an additional pleasure in the diary's dating, one whose significance is amplified in war. The seemingly simple act of transcribing the day's date also functions in connecting the diarist, if only for a moment, to the infinite and the permanent. 'The pleasure of dating', he writes, 'consists of being hooked into a little bit of eternity'.[91] Its transcription 'make[s] the fugitive and the eternal coincide […]'.[92] The here and now is thereby transmitted 'into the future

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[88] W.T. Colyer, diary/memoir, IWM. Documents. 7256 (76/51/1).
[89] C. Dodsworth, diary, IWM, Documents. 4368 (82/12/1), p. 2.
[90] Ethel Bilbrough, *My War Diary, 1914-1918* (London: Ebury Press, 2014), p. 3.
[91] Phillipe Lejeune, 'Writing While Walking', p. 124.
[92] Ibid., p. 124.

by creating a range of possible anniversaries over the years'.[93] The desire for, and significance of, this connection to eternity, to permanence, is perhaps never more keenly felt than in war, where one's way of life and/or one's body is placed under threat. 'I watched coffin after coffin', writes Nurse Notley in her diary, '[nurses] and officers included, side by side. […]. [It] made one think and wonder how soon one's turn would come'.[94] In this context, the diary's connection to permanence—however tangential—sharpens its personal significance. On the front, in particular, it undoubtedly provided some sense of calm and comfort amid brutal violence and frequent, random death. Looking back on his war writing, Siegfried Sassoon describes his diary as being endowed with 'heart-easing capabilities': '[t]here was something between those pages which anyhow couldn't be taken away from me'.[95] To the home front civilian man or woman, the diary's 'transmi[ssion] into the future' was also particularly appealing, though undoubtedly less desperately desired. In a social context where the population was constantly being reminded of the historical nature of the present moment, the personal significance of the diary as a site of documentation and reportage was greatly heightened, as was the diarist's self-positioning within it. Its pages offered many older middle-and-upper-class men and women, for example, a venue for the performance of their own form of valid wartime identity: that of chronicler, or reporter—their private, dutiful documentation of the war's major events, its thrills and its disruptions, were written specifically for the 'transmi[ssion] into the future' that Lejeune theorizes. 'It seems to me', writes Ethel Bilbrough in her diary in July 1915, 'that everyone who happens to be alive in such stirring epoch-making times, ought to write <u>something</u> of what is going on! Just think how interesting it would be to read in years hence!'[96]

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[93] Ibid., p. 124.
[94] Miss MCD Notley, diary, 22 May 1918, IWM, Documents. 15305 (06/100/1).
[95] Siegfried Sassoon, cited in Thomas Mallon, *A Book of One's Own*, p. 70.
[96] Ethel Bilbrough, *My War Diary, 1914-1918* (London: Ebury Press, 2014), p. 3. Underlining in original.

The diary's generic tie to temporality, however, is perhaps most significant in its ability to freeze time. War experience for many is characterized by radical disjuncture: families are separated; new roles are taken on; life is threatened; death, whether seen, reported, or grieved, is a constant presence. The future, a fundamental, if imagined, component of one's personal 'life narrative', is rendered profoundly uncertain and unclear. In these extreme conditions, the individual's experience of *time* is radically altered. Both soldiers and nurses, for example, write frequently of the rapid passage of time during moments of action and distress. In his memoir, *Undertones of War*, Edmund Blunden writes that, 'Time went by, but no one felt the passage of it, for the shadow of death lay over the dial'.[97] Conversely, times of rest or inaction can cause a dreaded slowing of time and, in turn, a monotonous blending together of days without variety or novelty. '[T]he true image of bloody war' is found in the 'eternal hours when Time itself stayed still […]' writes Ford Madox Ford in *Parade's End*.[98] At home, time could be slowed by the anxiety and agony of waiting for news of a loved one. Vera Brittain writes of time's being painfully both static and uncontrollable in *Testament of Youth*. She recalls, 'The clock marking off each hour of dread, str[iking] into the immobility of tension with the shattering effect of a thunderclap'.[99] The feeling, and frequent description of, the war as a radical disjuncture in history only contributed to the general sense of unease with war's time. 'All connection with everything of every kind that has gone before seems to have been broken', asserted Henry James in September of 1914.[100] In this context, the diary's dated page offers an opportunity to capture, and, in turn, gain some sense of control over, an otherwise uncontrollable moment. It allows a chance to freeze time, to 'accumulate traces', and to provide a chaotic life with 'the consistency and continuity it lacks'.[101] The reestablishment of this sense of continuity, of time's

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[97] Edmund Blunden, *Undertones of War* (1929; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961), p. 125.
[98] Ford Madox Ford, *Parade's End* (1924-28; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982), p. 569.
[99] Vera Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, p. 121.
[100] Henry James, letter, 2 September 1914, *The Letters of Henry James*, ed. by Percy Lubbock (London: Virago, 1984), p. 24.
[101] Lejeune, 'How Do Diaries End?' p. 195.

being slowed and controlled, undoubtedly provides the diarist with a sense of comfort and reassurance, however temporary.

It should also be noted, however, that while the diary can offer relief from, and amid, war's chaos, at the same time, this chaos—social, political, material, and psychological in nature—can challenge and demand extension, or breakdown, of the diary's form. Indeed, in war's extreme environments, even the usually taken-for-granted material elements and conditions of diary writing can pose a challenge to the diarist. The most basic elements of writing—time, light, stillness of hand, blank page, pen—can be limited, if not made impossible in war's trenches, prisons, and hospitals. Writing on the hospital floor during a night shift, nurse Dorothea Crewdson, for example, begins to describe her busy day, before she is called away. 'So only the worst cases are left […] Do not think there is another…'.[102] Furthermore, as the individual is pushed to extremes in experience, so too is his/her ability (and means) to express that experience. '[War is] sordid, noisy, terrifying, wretched and utterly uncongenial to clear thought and orderly writing', writes Private Smith in his diary.[103] War's conditions, in other words, push both diarist and diary to their limits and beyond. The diary's form and generic conventions are stretched and broken. Among the most obvious signs of this strain is the occasional—or, for some, frequent—*absence* of the day's date. Time can be marked, rather, by the number of surgery cases brought into the field hospital ward, by the beginning and end of a major battle on the front, and/or by the safe receipt of the next letter by those anxiously awaiting news at home.

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[102] Dorothea Crewdson, *Dorothea's War: A First World War Nurse Tells Her Story* (London: Phoenix, 2014), p. 50.
[103] Private Len Smith, *Drawing Fire: The Diary of a Great War Soldier and Artist* (2009; London: Harper Collins, 2012), unnumbered page.

ii. The internalized addressee

The diary's internalized addressee, or imagined future reader, renders its pages fundamentally more private than those of the letter. Indeed, the diarist has, generally speaking, control over his/her text; he/she can decide who may, and may not, read it. 'Arnold wanted to read my diary this afternoon and I wouldn't let her', writes VAD nurse Crewdson, 'but then there are no great secrets'.[104] In the context of war, both privacy and the personal, or individual, is complicated and reduced in value by the state. Indeed, it is a part of the 'sacrifice' expected and demanded of every patriotic citizen—the needs of the nation must take precedence over that of the individual. The prominence of this belief sanctified open hostility and judgment on the home front. 'Is Your Best Man Wearing Khaki? Don't You Think He Should Be?', demanded one propaganda poster.[105] Of course, on the battlefront, military training and law demanded that men make the ultimate sacrifice—death; refusal to comply, to give into the survival instinct and run, could result in Court Martial, which too could demand a man's death. This was the case for the roughly 300 British servicemen who were shot by firing squad. In this context, the diary's private pages were, for many, rendered infinitely more precious. Indeed, by virtue of its internalized dialogue, the diary provides a 'secret space[ ] within a larger social world', a space of private refuge and calm, where the day's experiences can be mediated upon, and, potentially, attributed personal meaning and value, thereby offering a sense of restored stability and control to the writer, however temporary.[106]

This search for, and reassertion of, personal meaning, brings the public back into the private realm of the diary. As argued by Penny Summerfield, 'cultural constructions form the discursive context not only within which people express and understand what happens, but also within which

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[104] Dorothea Crewdson, *Dorothea's War: A First World War Nurse Tells Her Story* (London: Phoenix, 2014), p. 63.
[105] 'To the Young Women of London', 1915, Parliamentary Recruiting Committee Poster No. 108, IWM, Art. PST 4903.
[106] Lejeune, 'How Do Diaries End?', p. 195.

they actually have those experiences'.[107] Thus after a particularly difficult shift, having lost '3 boys of 19 with chest wounds', Nurse Mary Notley turns to the comfort of public discourses surrounding 'noble, heroic sacrifice'. '[A]nd yet, what nobler death could one wish for "For King and Country". I envied them in a way'.[108]

For some men and women, the diary's private pages invite a writing that is less restrained than that of the letter. While the letter's known audience can elicit a desire to protect, to not burden the reader with the war's realities, the diary, in contrast, can serve as a site of confession and cathartic release. Indeed, as argued by Thomas Mallon in *A Book of One's Own*, the diary is 'a very pliable priest', its promise of secrecy inviting men and women's 'ritual unburdenings'.[109] The diary's materiality here combines with its internalized addressee in inviting such unburdenings. As a tangible object, the written page can be destroyed, taking with it the diarist's impressions, declarations, and/or confessions. This potential for destruction, for erasure, is undoubtedly a fundamental factor in its eliciting men and women's more detailed, and often more intimate, revelations in war. The diary, in particular on the hospital floor and in the reserve lines or rest camps, often contains more self-reflexive writing than the letter. Its private pages' house more graphic detail and more admission. 'Perhaps I am a slacker', confides Harold Cossins, a civilian; 'A fellow near asked me if I'd help him back, writes combatant H.T. Clements, "'No" I yelled—"take off your equipment and crawl". It was rotten'.[110] In these moments, the diary is a site of release, of unburdening. In committing the details of a traumatic or unsettling event, or thought, to the written page, the diarist physically separates them from her/himself. The sense of resulting relief, however temporary, aids in allowing one to 'carry on'. Such divestment, or separation, of the traumatizing sight to the page, can

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[107] Penny Summerfield, *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives: Discourse and Subjectivity in Oral Histories of the Second World War* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1998), p. 12.
[108] Miss M. C. D. Notley, diary, 22 March 1918, IWM, Documents. 15305 (06/100/1).
[109] Thomas Mallon, *A Book of One's Own: People and Their Diaries* (London: Pan Books, 1985), p. 209.
[110] 2nd Lieutenant H.T. Clements, diary, 1 July 1916, IWM., Documents. 3413 (86/76/1).

be brought to its climax with the destruction of the diary. In his essay 'How Do Diaries End?', Phillippe Lejeune theorizes that '[t]he future self is liberated from the weight of the past by this destruction, while the present self is relieved by the new writing. The function of expression is dissociated from the function of memory—one can even say it is tied to a function of forgetting. This is the logic of shedding'.[111] In these moments, the diary's lack of definite audience—being generally imagined or absent entirely in the case of destruction—allows for greater freedom of expression than that of the letter. '[T]he confession is to the future or to the beloved page', writes Julie Rak, 'but not—and this is important—to any authority. If anything, diaries evade authority'.[112] The diarist, then, need not burden a reader with his/her experiences or actions in war. Perhaps, this unburdening in the diary, permits, or at least partly facilitates, the more positive focus of many men's letter writing. Having committed the day's most traumatic events or experiences to the diary page, the soldier, or nurse, is then better equipped to keep up what Sassoon refers to as the 'polite pretence' with civilians at home.[113] 'Another short letter to let you know that I am fit and cheerful and so on', writes E.K. Smith in a letter to his mother in September 1915.[114]

The absence of a specific audience, however, can also remove the need to orient the experience of war and its environments with home—these linkages are demanded, as we shall see, by the letter's dialogistic form. Its epistolary gap demands that a common ground, or self-positing, be established between writer and reader. The diary's more private, one-sided form, makes no such demands. Its pages, then, for some, preserves a war—and a war identity—that is more alien, more isolated, and thus more separate from the pre-war life (and pre-war facets of self). In these instances, the diary can become not a safe space, but rather, a dangerous one.

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111 Lejeune, 'How Do Diaries End?', *On Diary*, p. 195.
112 Rak, 'Dialogue with the Future: Philippe Lejeune's Method and Theory of Diary', *On Diary*, p. 19.
113 Siegfried Sassoon, *Siegfried's Journey*, p. 14.
114 E.K. Smith, letter, 18 September 1915, *Letters Sent From France: Service with the Artists' Rifles and The Buffs, December 1914 to December 1915* (London: J. Cobb, n.d.), p. 95.

However, while the diary might be used at times as a site of release, and at others a site to catalogue the war's horrors, for some, its malleable form allows it to become a site of active avoidance and distraction. Choosing to focus on the positive, on the familiar, is an effective means of *avoiding* focus on the terrors and/or tedium of the trenches. Martz et al, in *Trauma Rehabilitation After War and Conflict,* asserts that active distraction and avoidance can be highly effective—in the short term—in allowing the continued function of traumatized people; 'avoidance', they assert, may be particularly helpful in situations where the stressor is uncontrollable or cannot be changed'.[115] 'If I started into detail of our engagement, I should disturb the censor and my own rest', writes Wilfred Owen to his mother in October 1918, shortly after returning to the front from Craiglockhart hospital.[116] Equally significant, then, is what is selectively silenced, or omitted, from the written page. In these instances, a kind of self-censorship is imposed; men can choose what they want to describe or avoid. In this regard, the diary is again a space of personal freedom, a space where men can construct a less traumatic, if less accurate, war. Combatants can thus turn from the profoundly uncontrollable and indiscriminately brutal spaces of the war's frontlines to spaces that *can* be controlled—the construction of the dug-out 'home' and the blank page. On the home front, the mother, wife, or friend who awaits news from a soldier can also find distraction in remembering, or imagining, past (or future) scenes of domestic bliss. In these moments, the diary houses an idealized world of safety, wherein the imagined self is recognizable and whole.

Finally, the diary's arguably most poignant function in war is found in its offering of a form of self-preservation. In this regard, the diary's generic conventions relating to both temporality and audience combine with its materiality. In particular for the frontline soldier, the diary's pages can offer a form of survival. As a tangible record of a life at war, the diary provides a way in which the

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[115] Martz, et al., *Trauma Rehabilitation After War and Conflict* (Springer: New York, 2010), p. 255.
[116] Wilfred Owen, letter, 4 October 1918, in Bell, ed., *Wilfred Owen. Selected Letters* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1985) p. 351.

frontline soldier can 'live on'. Perhaps the diary's open-ended nature in itself is a source of comfort in this context. There is always a page beyond the day's entry—a small sign of continuation, of the future. The page that ever-follows is a hopeful illusion; it offers the diarist a time lived beyond the day's writing. Considering this illusion, Philippe Lejeune asks, 'is it any different from the illusion that gives us courage, day after day, to live out the rest of our lives?'.[117] At the same time, the diary is ever-gesturing toward the future, for 'to whom' does the soldier, nurse, or mother, 'tell a blank page?'. The internalized future audience, no matter what imagined form it takes, can also provide comfort and consolation in this context. Whether relative, spouse, friend, or unknown historian, this audience can serve as a kind of trustee, an inheritor and safe-keeper of a life lived at war. There is a transference and transformation of 'duty' here; the personal sacrifice, documented and preserved by the writer, is given over to the audience, or reader, whose duty it is to receive, to understand, and to memorialize the self as he/she is presented in the diary's pages. 'My darling, *au revoir*', writes Captain Charles May in his diary, a mere fortnight before his death, '[these lines] may well be my last message to you. If they are, know through all my life that I loved you and baby with all my heart and soul […]. I pray God I may do my duty, for I know, whatever that may entail, you would <u>not have it otherwise</u>.[118] I will turn now to the generic conventions of the letter, comparing and contrasting its potential function with that of the diary in aiding in the construction, maintenance, and repair of identity in war.

[117] Lejeune, 'How Do Diaries End?', *On Diary*, p. 197.
[118] Charles May, *To Fight Alongside Friends: The First World War Diaries of Charlie May*, ed. by Gerry Harrison (London: Harper Collins, 2014), p. 204. Underlined three times in original.

The Letter

In several fundamental ways, the function of the diary overlaps with that of the letter, their generic conventions, at times, blurring together.[119] Indeed, as argued by Margaretta Jolly, 'there are permanently leaky borders between letters and other genres of writing'.[120] In war, both diary and letter offer the writer a space to express and navigate the multiple facets and fragments of identity; both challenge the boundary between communication and expression, inviting, in equal measure, imagination and documentation, fantasy and memory, distraction and cathartic divestment. Both forms, furthermore, offer the writer repeated opportunities to narrate his/her personal experience of war's confusion, trauma, and grief; this repeated narration, provides order and structure to the chaotic—a small act of control. Several psychological studies on trauma in fact suggest that feelings of anxiety can be reduced through the habitual re-telling of the trauma narrative; when conducted 'in the context of a safe and trustworthy therapeutic relationship', these re-tellings can gradually reduce the anxiety of the traumatized.[121] Though in different ways, both diary and letter encourage and facilitate men and women's re-tellings in war. However, the letter's specific generic characteristics do render its functions different in several ways from that of the diary. Its writer's intense awareness of the addressee, in particular, accounts for its eliciting of different responses, depictions, and performances in war.

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[119] The most obvious form of this blurring is found when the diary takes on the form of a letter, having its characteristic addressee. Captain Charles May, for example, addresses each of his diary entries to his wife, Maude. Perhaps this blurring of forms provides a greater sense of comfort to May. In rendering the diary, a representation of his wife—an imagined Maude—he can, in a sense, carry her with him; she is an ever-present listener, or companion, not unlike Anne Frank's 'Kitty'. Charles May, *To Fight Alongside Friends: The First World War Diaries of Charlie May*, ed. by Gerry Harrison (London: Harper Collins, 2014).

[120] Margaretta Jolly and Liz Stanley, 'Letters as/not a genre', *Life-Writing* 2.2 (2005), p. 94.

[121] Debra Kaminer, 'Healing Processes in Trauma Narratives: A Review', *South African Journal of Psychology* 36.3 (2006), pp. 486-487. See also, L.H. Jaycox, E.B. Foa, et al., 'Influence of Emotional Engagement and Habituation on Exposure Therapy for PTSD', *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 66.1 (1998), pp. 185-192.

In her essay, 'The Epistolarium: On Theorizing Letters and Correspondences', Liz Stanley outlines the features of the letter.[122] Dialogical in form, letters are a reciprocal exchange between one person and another or others.[123] Written always in the present tense, they 'are strongly marked by their quotidian present'.[124] As documents that function in closing the epistemological gap between sender and receiver, the letter invites a self-positioning. Its writer frequently describes the conditions of writing as well as the simple routines of the day. Furthermore, as a material object, bearing signs of the sender—his/her handwriting, characteristic turns of phrase, the style of folding—the letter can create a 'simulacrum of presence by "standing for" or conjuring up the writer'.[125] Finally, and crucially, the letter form demands a performance of self, the characteristics of which are dependent upon the chosen recipient. Its tone, content, and even word choice, are adjusted and altered. The 'self' one performs and/or depicts in the letter's pages, therefore, is directly related to the perceived expectations of the recipient.

At times, this intense awareness of the addressee's sensibilities and expectations results in self-censorship; a soldier, for example, may not wish to disturb those at home with descriptions of the war's realities. Conversely, the home front wife, sister, or mother, may not wish to burden the frontline soldier with domestic struggles. 'The style and tone of your letters assure me that you are keeping well and bright', writes Arthur Harrington in a letter to his wife, 'and that is the condition I desire above all others that you should always find yourself in, so that I may find the same happy girl awaiting me on my return'.[126] Self-censorship was thus both protective and prescribed; it was a source of both comfort and frustration. In addition to this self-censorship is the more official control imposed by the state. Combatants were not permitted to disclose any information in letters

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[122] Liz Stanley, 'The Epistolarium: On Theorizing Letters and Correspondences', *Auto/Biography,* 12 (2004), pp. 201-235.
[123] Ibid., p. 202.
[124] Ibid., p. 208.
[125] Ibid., p. 209.
[126] Arthur Harrington, letter, *Wives and Sweethearts: Love Letters Sent During Wartime*, ed. by Alastair Massie and Frances Parton (London and New York: Simon and Schuster, 2015), p. 26.

that might be used by the enemy if intercepted. Ensuring compliance, men's letters were read by their commanding officer, while the postal office provided additional censoring. Awareness of this official, external gaze undoubtedly influenced what many included, or omitted, from their correspondence. Nevertheless, during the First World War, the letter was the primary means of maintaining connection to not only pre-war lives but also pre-war selves. As argued by Carol Acton in her study of wartime grief, '[i]n spite of the limitations imposed on wartime letter writing, letters were crucial in creating community and maintaining bonds of intimacy'.[127] Between 1914 and 1918, the British Army Postal Service delivered roughly two billion letters; '[i]n 1917 alone, over 19,000 mailbags crossed the English Channel each day, transporting letters and parcels to British troops on the Western Front'.[128] These letters, and their reciprocal responses, were the primary medium through which feelings of normality, continuance, and intimacy were maintained. They were, in turn, vital mechanisms for the creation, maintenance, and repair of identity on both home and battlefront. In the sections that follow, I will outline how the letter's generic conventions function in war. For the purposes of clarity, these fundamental characteristics are divided under subheadings.

i. The letter's recipient, or audience, and its demand for the performance of self

The letter's known, and chosen, audience is arguably its most significant feature in relation to its function as a tool for self-navigation and self-reassertion. Indeed, it is the assumed expectations of this known audience, or reader, that determines the particular form of identity that is presented in its pages—as son, as professional, as friend, as wife. It is also *from* this known audience that the sender often desires and/or receives confirmation of that self—or, alternatively, empathy and advice on how to proceed in the face of its loss or fragmentation. As argued by Graham Dawson, 'subjective

[127] Carol Acton, *Grief in Wartime: Private Pain, Public Discourse* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 9.
[128] Amanda Mason and Ellen Parton, 'Letters to Loved Ones', IWM, www.iwm.org.uk/history/letters-to-loved-ones [accessed 22 January 2016].

composure fundamentally depends upon social recognition, with its power to confirm that the visions of the self and world […] correspond to those of other people'.[129] 'My dear father', writes Coningsby Dawson in February 1917, 'I'm over thirty, and yet just as much a little boy as ever. I still feel overwhelmingly dependent on your good opinion and love'.[130] In these moments, the letter's reciprocal form—functioning in maintaining the relationship between sender and receiver(s)—simultaneously allows for the development of what Margaretta Jolly terms, 'a sense of inner self and self-esteem'.[131] In war's extreme environments, wherein the soldier, in particular, must perform his profoundly new role under threat of death, this desire for self-assurance is greatly increased. This need frequently surfaces in the form of self-declarations, particularly in the war's early months, as many men seek confirmation of their newly militarized identities; 'I got my "baptism" alright and didn't mind a bit […]. So I'm the first of the [men] to come under fire', proudly writes A.S. Lloyd in a letter to his wife in July 1915.[132]

Of course, the form of verification, or confirmation, men and women required varied, depending upon the given audience, their surroundings, and their experiences. The war letters of Lieutenant Coningsby Dawson, for example, present—and seek confirmation for—multiple facets of self, facets that are altered and/or fractured as his time at the front drags on. In letters to his mother, for example, he is a devoted and protective son, often omitting the most frightening of his experiences; in letters to his father, in contrast, he is a frank and confessional confidant. These letters, though less frequent in number to those sent to his mother, are more candid, not only in describing the war's realities, but also in relaying his varied feelings in relation to them. A third voice, and/or facet of identity, is presented in letters written to his sister; here he is a nostalgic and joking

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[129] Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 23.
[130] Coningsby Dawson, letter, 1 February 1917, P. 162.
[131] Margaretta Jolly and Liz Stanley, 'Letters as/not a genre', *Life-Writing* 2.2 (2005), p. 99.
[132] Lieutenant A.S. Lloyd, letter, 27 July 1915, IWM, Documents. 20535.

friend, seeking to connect past to present by drawing on shared memories of pre-war time spent together. The letter writer thus alters his/her self in accordance with the perceived expectation of the given audience. This, at times, involves a self-censorship. As argued by Michael Roper, 'The person being imagined and addressed brought some state to mind, suppressed others and left others yet unthought'.[133] In a July 1915 letter, Cecil Stockbridge writes to his sister, Marguerite, describing the death of a fellow soldier who he had watched die. Stockbridge here uses the letter as a venue for both unburdening and navigation, as he attaches meaning to the death—'He was buried with many a hero'.[134] In the letter, he is candid, telling her, 'a shell hit him in the side'; his brother, 'only a few yards away', tried to bandage him up'.[135] Five days before this letter was written, he had relayed the same event in a letter to his grandmother. This letter, in contrast, presents an altered 'voice', one palpably conscious of the different expectations and/or perceived reactions of its audience. Overall, this letter is much more positive in tone and content. The same tragic scene is described to his grandmother, but with less detail; he writes only that when he returned to the trench, 'a pal of [his] had been killed'.[136] It seems his sister Marguerite as reader permits a greater unburdening. As grandson, Stockbridge is a protector, not wanting to worry his grandmother; as brother, in contrast, he can *seek* consolation and comfort—forms of protection. In both instances—and indeed, throughout his war, as he frequently writes to both women—Stockbridge temporarily inhabits his pre-war, domestic roles. This repeated reprisal of the various home front facets of identity allows for some form of continuance and connection to be maintained, a sense of continuity that was undoubtedly comforting amid war's danger, discomfort, and dislocation.

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133 Roper, *The Secret Battle*, p. 25.
134 Cecil Stockbridge, letter, 29 July 1915, IWM, Documents. 15796 (07/41/1).
135 Ibid.
136 Ibid., 24 July 1915.

ii. Closing the epistemological gap—the letter, time, and space.

In addition to providing a venue for the presentation (and reciprocal confirmation) of self or selves, the letter's external addressee also elicits a self-positioning in time and place. Indeed, it is the letter writer's physical and experiential separation from the recipient that generates the need for (and expectation of) the writer's self-positioning. In attempting to make the war's profoundly unfamiliar environments clear to the reader, the soldier or nurse often ties them to elements of the familiar. In Stanley's words, the exchange of letters 'constitute a theatre for the construction and performance of self in which the distance of time, space and the absence of face-to-face contact enables rather than disables communication […]. When a relationship is confined to the epistolary, everything that needs to be known is presented within such exchanges'.[137] 'Your letters reached me in the midst of a bombardment—I read them in a kind of London fog of gunpowder smoke', writes Coningsby Dawson on 1 October 1916.[138] Writing to his wife upon his arrival in France, Lieutenant A.S. Lloyd describes his first billet: 'This chateau is a fine old place. […] There are cows, goats, horses, dogs, cats, rats, and fleas galore and it is just the sort of old half bombed down place that one reads about […]. Small wife would love it'.[139] In these instances, the known letter's audience creates opportunities for drawing connections and for bridging gaps—geographic, experiential, and temporal. This bridging, which draws those at home into the soldier's frontline surroundings, functions in combating isolation and alienation; it allows for some sense of continued shared experience, this being vital to men's emotional survival. Exemplified here is the letter's marrying of function and expression; it indeed highlights, as Margaretta Jolly and Liz Stanley argue, the 'affective

[137] Ibid., p. 208.
[138] Dawson, letter, 1 October 1916, p. 76.
[139] Lieutenant A. S. Lloyd, letter, IWM Documents. 20535.

dimension of the communicative form', a dimension whose significance is greatly enhanced by war's profoundly dehumanizing violence and deprivation.[140]

The correspondent's intense awareness of his/her audience, coupled with the letter's tangible form, also invites an imagining of the spaces in which its recipient resides and in which the letter was written. While the diary is generally internally focused, the letter's more conversational style requires, and/or invites, more external emphasis. Frontline soldiers and nurses, for example, frequently conjure the familiar spaces of home, a conjuring that can inspire feelings of connection and continuance. 'I can imagine how everything looks at home, and the garden as you say must be almost at its best, you will soon be having beans I presume', writes A.H. Hubbard in response to a letter from his sisters, Nellie and Ivy.[141] If, in writing to family or friends, the spaces in which they reside are more easily conjured, so too are the facets of identity that once inhabited those familiar spaces. The letter's known audience demands a reprisal of these roles. On 14 May 1915, Lieutenant Colonel E.W. Hermon assured his wife that he would send her 'a cheque to cover rates & taxes when he [got his] bankbook'.[142] E.K. Smith thanks his mother for keeping him abreast of his father's 'business matters' in January 1915. In December of the following year, Wilfrid Cove reassures his daughter, Marjorie, that, 'Santa Claus will come just as usual' this year, even though she will 'have to do without Daddy'.[143] Such letters highlight the multiple facts of identity—both soldier and civilian—men held simultaneously, countering assertions that 'discontinuity and distance' defined relationships between the front and home.[144]

The letter is also a site of confession and cathartic release. While the diary's more private pages, on the whole, invite more divestment, for some, the unburdening of one's most pressing fears

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[140] Margaretta Jolly and Liz Stanley, 'Letters as/not a genre', p103.
[141] A.H. Hubbard, letter, IWM, Documents. 22009.
[142] Lieutenant Colonel E.W. Hermon, letter, 14 May 1915, *For Love and Courage: Lieutenant Colonel E.W. Hermon from the Western Front 1914-1917*, ed. by Anne Nason (London: Preface, 2008), p. 23.
[143] Cove, letter, 4 December 1916, *Love Letters of the Great War*, p. 34.
[144] Eric Leed, *No Man's Land*, pp. 22-23.

or frustrations requires a sympathetic ear, along with the promise of comfort and consolidation the letter's reciprocal form allows. This is particularly the case for young men, men who wrote, most frequently, to their mothers. As argued by Michael Roper, 'It was often with their mothers that they had shared their most vulnerable feelings as children, or at least had expected to, and this expectation would re-surface during the war'.[145] In the context of war, among the safest spaces for the frontline soldier was the blank page that began, 'Dearest Mother'. Having confessed 'a thing [he has] always dreaded'—not being thought a 'real soldier' by his men—E.K. Smith goes on to tell his mother that he has 'been having dreams about my entire platoon being convicted of something dreadful'.[146] Writing to his mother in November of 1915, Cecil Stockbridge, eighteen when he enlisted, similarly confesses, 'for a few seconds I thought I was wounded, but worst luck, it was a spent piece of shrapnel. You will be surprised to hear me say "what luck", but really Mother dear, I get so "fed up" sometimes that I wish I could get to England even wounded'.[147] Psychology has long associated the act of confession, or unburdening, with feelings of release and relief. In war, it is the letter's form—and its inherent tie to relationship—that permits this form of cathartic divestment. Its known audience can provide a sympathetic or compassionate ear. In these moments, there is also a continuance in pre-and post-war relationships (and identities) as sons and husbands, as men continue to draw emotional support from those at home.

At other moments, however, the letter's dialogistic, relational form elicits a softening, or silencing, of the war's realities on both home and front. Indeed, as Michael Roper asserts, '[b]oth those who emphasize the richness of accounts produced in letters, and those who question it, are partially correct'.[148] For women writing to soldiers on the front, these moments enact the tensions,

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145 Michael Roper, *The Secret Battle: Emotional Survival in the Great War* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2009), p. 25.
146 2nd Lieutenant Ernest Kennedy Smith, letter, 28 October 1915, *Letters Sent from France: Service with the Artists' Rifles and the Buffs, December 1914 to December 1915* (London: J. Cobb, no date)
147 C. Stockbridge, letter, 1 November 1915, IWM, Documents. 15796 (07/41/1).
148 Michael Roper, *The Secret Battle*, p. 63.

and contradictions, between the public and the private. 'My very dearest, precious boy, Cyril', writes Winifred Blackburn, 'I do not know how to write, I cannot properly collect my thoughts […] to think that you have really gone so far away from me, almost breaks my heart, but I will keep up for your own sake […]. Do forgive the whole strain of this letter'.[149] The diary, in this regard, offers greater freedom. Frequently reminded by newspapers, magazines, and political speeches, of her role in stoically bolstering and supporting her 'soldier hero', Blackburn here struggles between socially prescribed behaviour and personal fears and desires. The letter's pages enact these tensions through silence, repetition, and contradictions. Herein marks a point where the diary offers greater freedom of expression. The letter form, with its known audience, often reveals itself to be more clearly (and self-consciously) mediated. This need to self-censor could, for some, exasperate feelings of separation and alienation.

iii. The letter's troubling of time

Like the diary, the letter has a complex relationship with time. In spite of its present tense, the recipient knows that the 'moment' described has already passed. That moment, furthermore, will perpetually remain in the present, even if read, and reread, one hundred years into the future. Like a photograph, then, a letter freezes time, and with it the particular image or representation of the self it captures. In wartime, this 'temporal slipperiness', as it is termed by Stanley, is at times a source of comfort, and at others a source of profound anxiety.[150] In the first, more comforting, instance, the letter's materiality, like that of the diary's, creates a simulacrum of presence through its handwriting, its familiar turns of phrase, and its word choice. As a physical object, it represents its writer in the present tense. It conjures the writer, in the simplest and yet most vital sense, as alive. The comfort

[149] Winifred Blackburn, the letters of C.T. Newman, 11 May 1915, IWM, Documents. 12494 (03/5/1).
[150] Stanley, p. 209.

that this self-presentation/simulacrum provided was considerable. Winifred Blackburn, for example, writes of keeping her fiancé's letters under her pillow at night.[151] Others at home place particularly treasured letters near framed photographs, creating a kind of constant physical presence of the absent man at home. However, the comfort of the letter's 'freezing' of time—and the absent self it fleetingly holds as safe and whole—is limited. Its continuance was, crucially, ever-dependent upon the timely receipt of the *next* letter. In the context of war, the letter's temporal gap between sender and receiver risks extension into the infinite; the combatant could be killed before the letter's arrival at the front, or, conversely, in the in-term, during the letter's travel to home. Here the letter's characteristic temporal gap engenders profound fear and anxiety. 'Dearest Welsh, is there anything wrong, why I've not heard from you since Monday [?]', writes Edith Bennett.[152] I will turn now to the challenges posed by life-writing, before turning to an outlining of chapters.

IV. 'It stifles words': The challenges of testimony[153]

While letters and diaries offer us the most immediate recollection of war's events, they do inevitably pose challenges for scholarship. While every effort has been made, for example, to examine a broad range of men and women's voices and experiences, a 'representative' sample is challenging. While the Education Acts of the 1870s meant that literacy rates were considerably higher during this war than those previous to it, this did not always ensure a practiced comfort and familiarity with written communication.[154] The most avid writers were generally of the middle-and-upper-classes; their diaries and letters are often more detailed in nature, reflecting not simply a high level of education,

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[151] Winifred Blackburn, letter, 6 May 1915, included in documents of C.T. Newman. IWM. 03/5/1.
[152] Edith Bennett, letter, undated, IWM, Documents. (96/3/1).
[153] Henri Barbusse, *Under Fire*, trans. by Robin Buss (1916; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2003), p. 303.
[154] Randall Stevenson, *Literature and the Great War, 1914-1918* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013), p. 13.

but also of self-confidence. Writing on the Western Front in 1914, nurse Eleonora Pemberton perceptively highlights this challenge:

> The longer I am here, the more sorry I am for the poor Tommies' home people. Officers have so many more means of communicating with them and setting their minds at rest; they can tip orderlies to telegraph for them—often their wives can come out or friends are asked to look them up; but Tommy is just one of the herd; he has neither pens, ink nor paper, even if he feels well enough to write and as many of them have said when I have asked them — "I'm not much good at writing, Sister — *you* write for me". Almost every one I have asked has preferred to have it done for him and has not even been willing, or I suppose able, to dictate his own letter, but has preferred a stranger like myself to say whatever they choose! It seems strange, doesn't it? But I suppose it is a different level of education. In most cases they had hardly anything in the way of *news* of suggest and yet when one persevered one could drag quite an interesting story of personal exploits out of them.[155]

The war writing of working-class women is similarly sparse. As argued by Eva Figes, 'Whether or not their lives were restricted to the domestic sphere, women have always been considered less important than men. And, despite the lip-service paid to the angel in the house, domestic duties have been looked upon with open or secret contempt'.[156] In the context of war, when men alone are granted the authority to speak of its trauma and its suffering, women's personal accounts and correspondence are often not preserved. While this is due, in part, to the conditions of warfare—few soldiers had space or opportunity to save and transport letters—it is also reflective of the continued association of men with war. As asserted by James Campbell in 'Combat Gnosticism', '[t]he exclusive identification of war with combat results in a theory which would allow only combatants to write war literature, for only they are really affected by war. Anyone out of the trenches should not presume to infringe upon the direct, unmediated experience of those who do the actual fighting'.[157] Several of the unpublished letter collections written by women examined here, for example, were found by chance. The fascinating and detailed letters of Edith Bennett, Winnie

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[155] Eleonora Pemberton, cited in Eva Figes, ed., *Women's Letters in Wartime, 1450-1945* (London: Pandora, 1993), pp. 13-14.
[156] Eva Figes, Introduction, *Women's Letters in Wartime, 1450-1945* (London: Pandora, 1993), p. 14.
[157] James Campbell, 'Combat Gnosticism: The Ideology of First World War Poetry Criticism', *New Literary History*, 30.1 (1999), p. 205.

Newman, and Mrs. Page, for example, were archived simply as additional documents in the midst of their men's war materials—a husband, a fiancé, and a son, respectively. Referenced not by name in the archivist's description, but rather by their relation to the fighting man—if at all—their writing is unsearchable.

The study of personal narratives is further complicated by their relation to trauma. For trauma theorists such as Cathy Caruth, war's extreme violence is said to overwhelm the individual's ability to assimilate; such events exceed the capacity to understand and to make meaning. In Caruth's words, 'the traumatized […] carry an impossible history within them, or they become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess'.[158] The result is an absent narrative, one that surfaces as fragmented and unbidden images long after the original traumatic event has occurred—'shell shock'. However, as argued by Fiona Reid, 'most men did not become psychological causalities during the First World War; rather, most men dealt reasonably well with the stresses and strains of intense warfare'.[159] Furthermore, while the inability to communicate trauma is undoubtedly true for many, this theory does not account for the attempts made by countless men and women to convey—and make sense of—their experiences in writing. These texts, be they diaries, letters, memoirs, or novels, demand, as Jane Robinett argues, a 'more complex evaluation of the relationship between narrative and experience'.[160] In the succinct words of one combatant, E.K. Smith, 'I always write more when we are having the most uncomfortable time'.[161]

V. Chapter outlines

[158] Cathy Caruth, ed., *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1995), p. 5.
[159] Fiona Reid, *Broken Men: Shell Shock, Treatment and Recovery in Britain 1914-30* (London: Continuum, 2014), p2.
[160] Jane Robinett, 'The Narrative Shape of Traumatic Experience', *Literature and Medicine*, 26.2 (2007), p. 291.
[161] E.K. Smith, letter, p. 115.

Chapter One examines the life-writing of both combatant and civilian men. In particular, it considers how these men use the private, written page to help create, navigate, bolster, and solidify their new wartime identities. As the war's early months brought rapid change, redefining and ultimately creating a new hierarchy of acceptable forms of masculinity, men—whether enlisted or not—were left to navigate their identities *as men* in this new context of war. Once enlisted, the new recruit often sought connection to his as yet untested identity, drawing on readily available public scripts in order to lend shape and definition to his new role. 'I am setting out on a Crusade from which it would have been impossible to withhold myself with honour', writes one such volunteer soldier in a letter to his family.[162] The civilian man, in turn, often seeks refuge in the diary's pages. Here, he can privately shape, secure, and validate other forms of masculine identity, including that of father, husband, reporter, and/or policer, for example.

The counterpart for Chapter One, Chapter Two examines a diverse range of middle-and-upper-class women's life-writing on the home front. It considers how the private diary functions as a site for self-creation, as women seek shape, recognition, and authentication for their multiple wartime identities—as mother, wife, volunteer, professional, and private citizen. Not unlike the life-writing of civilian men, the diary and letter here illuminate the extent to which individual women are both shaped and shape themselves by the war's competing and contested public scripts surrounding patriotic womanhood. The chapter's latter sections turn to the function of the letter, providing an examination of how home front women used its pages to navigate feelings of fear, longing, and grief. At its close, the chapter considers how life-writing's 'subgenres'—memory books and scrapbooks—provided some women with a private space through which to continue their identities as mothers, wives, and sweethearts, even after the death of their fighting soldier.

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[162] Dawson, letter, 16 July 1916, p. 24. Capitalisation in original.

Building on the work of Chapter One, Chapter Three continues to focus on multiplicity and fluidity in representations of combatant identity. It examines the function of combatant life-writing on the western front, highlighting the multiple ways in which men used the diary and letter—whether consciously or not—to both reclaim and repair their civilian identities as sons, husbands, and fathers. This repeated reclamation and repair, conducted largely during moments of rest, undoubtedly contributed to many men's mental and emotional survival. This chapter also examines the *conditions* of writing in the midst of war. Indeed, the man who feels safe, clean, and whole, having temporarily vacated the 'purgatory' of the trenches, is better able to relinquish his (conscious) performance of the soldier's scripts of stoicism and endurance.[163] He can then return to the more civilian facets of his identity. The diary and letter's pages in such moments are spaces of freedom and refuge, spaces for fantasy, self-reflection, and cathartic release.

Chapter Four, the final chapter, examines the form and function of the frontline nurse's diary. It considers how these professional women navigated their dual role as witness and healer. In particular, it highlights the diary's function as a tool in the maintenance of the nurse's sense of professional identity, an identity that was increasingly troubled by her paradoxical role in war. Her training allowed her to repair the broken bodies of men so that they could return not to safety but to the battle zone, possibly to die. While the diary here serves as a site for containment, mitigation, and cathartic divestment, at other moments, it is a venue for mourning and memorialization.

[163] Harry Drinkwater, letter, 28 April 1916, *Harry's War*, p. 24.

CHAPTER ONE

'TO FIGHT OR STAY AT HOME [?]': CREATING, NEGOTIATING, AND PERFORMING THE NEWLY MILITARIZED MASCULINE IDENTITY IN THE EARLY WAR DIARY AND LETTER[1]

After completing his training in August 1916, Coningsby Dawson, a budding writer and eldest son to a wealthy and pious family, eagerly awaits his departure for France. While the decimated western front has seen two years of constant battle, this date marks the beginning of Dawson's war; his identity as soldier remains untested. As he awaits orders to cross the Channel from Shorncliffe, he writes an anxious and highly contemplative letter to his family—his father, mother, and younger sister. In it, he draws on multiple public scripts as he attempts to both navigate and secure his newly militarized masculine identity:

> My Dearests,
>
> […] There seems little doubt that we are to be in England for a little while taking special courses. I read Father's letter yesterday. You are very brave—you never thought that you would be the father of a soldier and sailors; […] Confess—aren't you more honestly happy to be our father as we are now than as we were? I know quite well you are, in spite of the loneliness and heartache. We've all been forced into heroism of which we did not think ourselves capable. We've been carried up to the Calvary of the world where it is expedient that a few men should suffer that all generations to come may be better.
>
> […] For me, I can go forward steadily because of the greatness of the glory. I never thought to have the chance to suffer in my body for other men. The insufficiency of merely setting nobilities down on paper is finished. How unreal I seem to myself! […]. I think the multitude of my changes has blunted my perceptions. […] My thoughts are always with you—I make calculations for the differences of time that I may follow more accurately your doings. I'd love to come down to the study summer-house and watch the blueness of the lake with you—I love those scenes and memories more than any in the world.
>
> Good-bye for the present. Be brave.
>
> Yours, Con.[2]

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[1] Captain W.C.S. Gregson, diary, 23 March 1915, Imperial War Museum (hereafter IWM), Documents. 7509 (75/104/1). The complete citation reads: 'Again perplexed as to what real duty is, to fight or stay at home. Feel very unhappy about it all'.

[2] Coningsby Dawson, letter, 19 August 1916, *Khaki Courage: Letters in War-Time*, ed. by W.J. Dawson (London: John Lane, 1917), pp. 31-33.

While the pride and excitement in this letter is palpable, it would be inadequate to simply read it as an example of one young man's blind 'war enthusiasm' or 'patriotic fever'.[3] This letter is, in fact, an early example of what will be an ongoing, and highly self-conscious, personal navigation of Dawson's role as soldier, a role he here attempts to both create and secure though declaration, performance, and, upon receipt of a letter in return, recognition. The latter he hopes to receive from his father in particular, his primary model for moral manhood—'Confess—aren't you more honestly happy to be our father as we are now than as we were?'. The 'scripts' of Dawson's performance of identity are thus multiple and overlapping. The references to 'bravery' and 'heroism', along with the elevated language of phrases like 'Calvary of the world' and 'greatness of the glory' are literary in nature, drawn from the selective syllabi of the public schoolroom, and co-opted by propaganda. Other scripts—or narrative threads—are arguably more personal in nature. The son of a minister, and once student of religious doctrine himself, Dawson also cites the war as an opportunity for him to 'suffer in [his] body for other men'. This is the language of Christian sacrifice, of purge and redemption, a language that offers Dawson the role of Christ figure, willing to sacrifice himself so that others might live better.[4] The letter, in short, offers a venue for the simultaneous creation, navigation, and performance of the newly militarized identity, an identity for which he seeks confirmation and validation from his recipient(s), or audience. As he writes in a later letter, 'Whatever happens, I know you will be glad to remember that at a great crisis I tried to *play the man*'.[5]

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[3] This language is frequently used in scholarly discussions of the war's early months. In these studies, the complexities and nuances of men's early enlistment considerations are very often smoothed over in summaries of the 'rush to the colours'. Some of these studies include: Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British society and the First World War* (London: The Bodley Head, 1965), p. 309, Malcolm Brown, *Tommy Goes to War* (London: J. M. Dent, 1978), pp. 13-14, Peter Parker, *The Old Lie: The Great War and the Public School Ethos* (London: Constable, 1987), p. 151, and W.J. Reader, *At Duty's Call: A Study in Obsolete Patriotism* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1988), p. 104.

[4] Ibid., p. 46. This view of enduring suffering and self-sacrifice as penance is of course a centuries-old one. In his second epistle to Timothy, the Apostle Paul urged: 'Thou therefore endure hardness as a good soldier to Jesus Christ'. 2 Tim. 2:3.

[5] Dawson, letter, 30 August 1916, p. 38. emphasis added.

As Dawson seeks connection to his, as yet, untested identity, he thus uses the written page as a kind of 'rehearsal space', trying out various public scripts as he seeks shape and definition for this new role. As he awaits his crossing of the Channel, a highly symbolic journey for this once budding writer, he positions himself somewhere between civilian and soldier, remarking on the geographic distance between him and his family, while, at the same time, imagining himself with them. His description of himself as a 'traveller between high hedgerows' is well chosen; the traveller's position is a temporary and transient one, as is the voluntary soldier's. Furthermore, on the written page itself, as in his mind, Dawson continuously 'travels' back to home, and subsequently, to his civilian self—as son, as brother, as writer.[6] The process of finding a sense of wholeness, of coherence, among his multiple facets of identity is thus an ongoing one. His continued connection to (and conjuring of) home will, in fact, become a source of strength, grounding his sense of identity, even in the midst of the front's death and destruction.[7] As the script of heroic soldier becomes increasingly difficult to perform, he will find comfort in the reprisal of other, more domestic roles, roles whose meaning and value remain secure. But, in this moment, his drawing together of his multiple roles is an act of navigation. Narration offers a sense of order and coherence, while the tangible, written page offers a sense of solidification. Life-writing, in short, offers Dawson some semblance of control over the 'multitude of [his] changes'. The fundamental role of narrative in the individual's creation, and maintenance, of the coherent 'sense of self', is stressed by contemporary cognitive psychologists. Serving both mnemonic and performative functions, 'stories', argue Alan Stewart and Robert Neimeyer, 'consolidat[e] a sense of who we are as the protagonists of our

[6] If the 'high hedgerows' are the war itself, then he will likely remain in them, as the Front offered men little perspective on the war as a whole; its larger movements and battles were largely unknown to the men who fought. Similarly, most men were not able to gain a larger perspective on their *own* war until long after the armistice. Only time and reflection could grant a clearer and deeper view of their experiences, a view above 'the hedgerows' and beyond.
[7] This constantly maintained connection to home and loved ones—common for many men—will be of central focus in Chapter Three.

accounts, and script[ ] the ways we engage in our lives with others'.[8] In wartime, such consolidating 'stories of self' are rendered infinitely more significant. Indeed, as one's identity—as a citizen, a patriot, a man—is threatened, the desire for both clarity and control is made markedly more necessary. In the face of death, this desire, for many, is increased exponentially.

Indeed, Dawson's desire for control and clarity within his 'protagonist role' as soldier is undoubtedly made all the more pressing at *this* specific juncture, as he prepares to depart for the front. His rhetorical performance, in other words, must soon be embodied or enacted; the relative safety and freedom offered by the letter's 'rehearsal stage', will transition into the real 'theatre of war'. It is telling, for example, that as he awaits his departure he writes a total of seven letters, each rhetorically reasserting the scripted contours of his new identity—brave, honourable, stoic, self-sacrificing. The tension and anxiety present 'between the lines' in each of these lengthy letters is palpable, if unacknowledged, by Dawson himself. No matter how skilled public discourse had become at obscuring many of the war's realities, men were generally well aware of the soldier script's potential end—he could die.[9] This fact made self-declaration and self-assertion more frequent and more pressing, and life-writing, through its offer of a sense of solidification and validation, more significant. Contemplating the precipice on which he stands, between imagination and fantasy and *lived* experience, he writes: 'Life has become so stern and so scarlet—and so brave. From my window I look out on the English Channel […] Over there beyond the curtain of mist lies France—and everything that awaits me. News has just come that I have to start. Will continue from France. Yours ever lovingly, Con'.[10]

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[8] Alan E. Stewart and Robert A. Neimeyer, 'Emplotting the Traumatic Self: Narrative Revision and the Construction of Coherence', *The Humanistic Psychologist*, 29 (2001), p. 8. Italics in original.
[9] *The Times* published its first list of British causalities on 3 September 1914. These lists would continue to be published regularly, in steadily increasing length, throughout the war ('The Toll of War', *The Times*, 3 September 1914, p. 9).
[10] Dawson, letter, 30 August 1916, p. 36.

This chapter examines the early life-writing of both combatant and civilian men. In particular, it considers how these men use the private, written page to help create, navigate, bolster, and solidify their new wartime identities—this in a social context of crude dichotomies and extreme shifts regarding conceptions of, and attitudes toward, male behaviour. 'Let the country be served by free men, and let them deal with the coward or the sluggard who flinches', fiercely writes Arthur Conan Doyle in 1914.[11] As the war's early months brought rapid change, redefining, and ultimately creating a new hierarchy for acceptable forms of masculinity, men—whether enlisted or not—were left to navigate their identities *as men* in this new context of war. 'Nothing would please me better than to die fighting for my country', writes B.W.S. Seymour Baily in a pleading letter to his father, '[d]o please say I can do this or I shall never respect myself again'.[12] 'Conscription looks as if it is really coming in and secretly I am hoping it will take us out of the Bank and let each of us do our bit as they call it!!', writes F.H. Ennor.[13] 'Life here is very sweet', writes E.W. Hewish in his diary, but I do want to take a man's part in this show'.[14] As the soldier was represented as the epitome of manliness, an internal struggle was undoubtedly engendered for countless men, whether they chose to enlist or not. Their identities—both as men, and as moral patriotic citizens—required redefinition, reassertion, and validation.

In this context, life-writing holds heightened significance. In the most basic sense, it provides individual men with some sense of control in the midst of social chaos. 'Journals sort', asserts Alexandra Johnson, '[t]hey wait till [we are] ready to cool or confirm stored impressions'.[15] The newly enlisted man, like Dawson, must attempt to both imagine and secure his new facet of identity, a task that requires self-reflection, and creative narration. In the words of this, as yet

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[11] Arthur Conan Doyle, *To Arms!* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1914), p. 13.
[12] Captain B.W.S. Seymour Baily, letter, 31 August 1914, IWM, Documents. 12642 (03/16/1).
[13] Frank H. Ennor, Scrapbook, IWM, Documents 2598 (86/28/1).
[14] Captain E.W. Hewish, diary, 6 May 1917, IWM, Documents (02/43/1).
[15] Alexandra Johnson, *Leaving a Trace: On Keeping a Journal* (New York: Hachette Book Group, 2001), p. 34.

untested, lieutenant, 'it seemed splendidly absurd that I was going to be a soldier'.[16] The civilian man, in turn, often seeks refuge in the diary's pages—his search to secure and validate other forms of 'manliness' is arguably more fraught. '[P]erhaps I am a "slacker"', confides one such civilian man in his diary in January 1916.[17] In such moments, life-writing texts can become a site for both the construction and maintenance of identity, allowing men to temporarily inhabit the role of performer, confessor, reporter, and/or traveller, among others. This chapter, drawing together the fields of war representation and life-writing, will focus on the ever-changing form and function of these early war narratives. It will, furthermore, illuminate what forms, styles, and scripts emerge in men's early war writings. How are the tensions between one's inner life and external pressures navigated? How does the audience—real or imagined—alter what is said on the page?

In her often-cited book, *The Blood of Our Sons*, Nicoletta Gullace asserts that '[w]ithin the wartime vocabulary of gender definitions, men were those who protected; women those who required protection. 'Unenlisted men', she argues, were therefore, 'ineluctably feminized by virtue of their place behind the lines'.[18] This, however, is not entirely accurate. Without denying the extremely pervasive pressures surrounding young men of military age, other forms of masculine identity were possible. Indeed, there was no single—or simple—image of 'proper' manhood between 1914 and 1918. Edwardian conceptions of male 'protection', furthermore, were not only physical, but financial, and, to a certain extent, emotional.[19] Reflecting this, Kitchener's 'first call' excluded married men entirely. Finally, public scripts, however prominent and desirable, were rife with both

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[16] Coningsby Dawson, *The Glory of the Trenches* (1918; Miami: HardPress Publishing, 2010), p. 36.
[17] H. Cossins, diary, 13 January 1916, IWM, Documents. PP/MCR/371.
[18] Nicoletta F. Gullace, *The Blood of Our Sons: Men, Women, and the Renegotiation of British Citizenship During the Great War* (Bassingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p. 43.
[19] Edwardian conceptions of manliness and military values were often ambivalent, even during the war's early months; this was particularly the case for married men with children. While masculine identity was forcefully tied to military service by more strident propaganda, other forms were tied to hard work, success in business, and, in particular, the ability to support one's dependents. See for example, J. Meyer, *Men of War: Masculinity and the First World War in Britain* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); S. Dudnik, K. Hagemann and J. Tosh (eds), *Masculinities in Politics and War: Gendering Modern History* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2004).

contradictions and paradoxes; as such they could be, and were, challenged, refused, and manipulated, as well as complied with. Conceptions of wartime masculinity, then, even in the war's early months, were far more flexible and multiple than has been previously suggested. This explains, at least in part, the fact that 'over half of the five million men enlisted in Britain during the war were compelled to do so'.[20] A frequent tendency, as Michael Roper has highlighted, is to elide popular images with personal experience and perception. Ideology is too often taken for lived experience.[21] In reality, men and women's conceptions of acceptable male and female behaviour were far more fluid and multifaceted. This fluidity is present in the diary and letter, where both soldier and civilian men compose complex and ever-altering, if self-conscious, personal narratives of valid 'patriotic manhood'. This chapter will examine how this validity—or meaning—is created and maintained in the diary and letter. Indeed, it was here that many middle and upper-class men in particular, sought to give shape and definition to their newly militarized identities. The life-writing genres provided safe venues where social scripts could be tried out and rehearsed; they were also, in turn, sites for the navigation of early fears, tensions, and anxieties. This focus on the war's 'ideological battlefronts' presents masculinity and male identity not as wholly prescribed and stagnant, but as an ongoing process, a process that is both reflected on, and facilitated by, the written page. I will turn now to an outlining of the war's prominent middle and upper-class scripts, along with their social and cultural roots, as they relate to men, masculinity, and soldiering, before turning to a detailed analysis of the function of combatant and civilian life-writing on the home front.

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[20] Lois Bibbings, 'Images of Manliness: The Portrayal of Soldiers and Contentious Objectors in the Great War', *Social and Legal Studies* 12.3 (2003), p. 336.
[21] Michael Roper, 'Between the Psyche and the Social: Masculinity, Subjectivity and the First World War Veteran', *The Journal of Men's Studies*, 15.3 (2007), p. 252.

I. Public scripts, propaganda, and soldering.

Great Britain declared war against Germany at 11pm on 4 August 1914. The first appeal from Lord Kitchener was for 100,000 men between the ages of nineteen and thirty and this 'Call to Arms' was quickly and enthusiastically answered. While the nation's collective memory of the 'rush to colours' is inaccurate—September had higher recruitment rates than August—early numbers of volunteers are, nonetheless, staggering.[22] By the end of September, 750,000 men had enlisted; before the end of 1915 this number had reached nearly 2 ½ million. This was 'a higher total than the country was able to obtain by conscription in 1916 and 1917 combined'.[23] The most commonly cited reason for this massive and unprecedented surge of support has remained largely consistent since 1914, even now, in the midst the war's centenary: it was a patriotic 'sense of duty' to their country that drove men to enlist. And yet, this seemingly transparent phrase is misleading. Its power—as ideology—was (and still is) found in its shrouding of the period's multiple and overlapping cultural forces. Indeed, that *sense* of duty, and its power to morally conscript men, was first fostered and instilled in the home, and then, in turn, in boy's schools, clubs, and literature. These primary sites of socialization had introduced men to the appropriate scripts of male behaviour long before the war; as asserted by John Tosh, 'the moral qualities required for survival in [the Victorian] world were summed up by the word "manliness", which meant courage, resolution, tenacity, and self-government or "independence"'.[24] While it was the Victorian father's responsibility to insure these qualities were instilled in his sons, it was the social pressure of peers and the public school system of the late-nineteenth-century that cultivated 'a strong but somewhat mechanical group loyalty, easily adapted

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[22] Catriona Pennell argues that 'no "rush to the colours" took place in August owing, in part, to the dislocation and uncertainty caused by the outbreak of war'. Recruitment had also reached its highest point just *before* the Parliamentary Recruitment Committee was active. *A Kingdom United: Popular Responses to the Outbreak of the First World War in Britain and Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012), pp. 144-45.
[23] Peter Simkins, *Kitchener's Army: the Raising of the New Armies, 1914-1916* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2007), p. 2.
[24] John Tosh, *Manliness and Masculinities in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Essays on Gender, Family and Empire* (Harlow Gate: Pearson Education Limited, 2005), p. 110.

to an unthinking patriotism and a secular sense of public duty'.[25] In *The Last Great War*, Adrian Gregory rightly argues that the middle classes were, generally speaking, more supportive of the war than other social classes, while public school-educated 'young middle- and upper-class men were the most conventionally patriotic component of the population'; they were thus proportionately more likely to enlist.[26] The young, public-schooled recruit was undoubtedly well-educated in the language of nation, duty, and sacrifice; he took for granted the honour and greatness of his country. His school syllabus celebrated past wars and military heroes, while his favourite writers presented danger and combat as sanctified opportunities for displays of courage and valour. In the words of one beloved George Alfred Henty character: 'Our duty is clear. God has sent us here to their aid, and whatever be the risk, we must run it'.[27] This boy's adventure story language is found reflected in the life-writing of many newly enlisted middle and upper-class men. As proudly declared by one public-schooled recruit, on his way to France: 'I am setting out on a Crusade from which it would have been impossible to withhold myself with honour'.[28] This heightened rhetoric, rooted in the masculine scripts of both Victorian and Edwardian Britain, was thus harnessed by the war's propaganda, where it was reconfigured, finding its ultimate expression in the figure of the heroic soldier. This script, in its extreme prominence, became the benchmark against which countless men, regardless of age and/or class, measured their own identities *as men* in war—whether enlisted or not.

In creating and bolstering this ultimate male role, politicians, journalists, and recruitment posters thus presented his 'script' as extremely desirable. Indeed, in drawing on the heightened and highly romanticised language of the public-schools, with their celebrated imperial heroes of

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[25] Ibid., pp. 112-113.
[26] Adrian Gregory, *The Last Great War* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008), p. 289.
[27] George Alfred Henty, 'The Mate's Story', *Tales from the Works of G. A. Henty* (London: Blackie & Son, 1893), p. 7. Henty—honorary Vice-President of the Boy's Brigade—was among the most popular writers of boy's adventure stories, writing nearly eighty historical tales of 'manly' endeavour. His tales 'are so well known and widely appreciated', writes the book's publisher, that the introduction 'need be of the briefest'.
[28] Coningsby Dawson, letter, 16 July 1916, *Khaki Courage*, p. 24.

unquestioned bravery, honour, and prowess, the role offered the young man a chance to be a heroic warrior, one who would reap the many rewards offered by the role's exalted status—respect, an unquestioned moral and masculine standing, celebration and memorialization in future history books, and female admiration and desirability. 'Daddy What Did You Do in the Great War?' asks one propaganda poster; 'Is your "Best Boy" wearing khaki?' demands another.[29] In *The Great War and Modern Memory*, Paul Fussell highlights public discourse's drawing upon the Victorian revival of the Arthurian chivalric code of manly and/or gentlemanly conduct—a language that is highly class-specific. Framed in this way, the war's gruesome and monotonous daily realities are obscured by the language of euphemistic romance; danger and battle become 'peril', the enemy becomes 'the foe', the horse 'a steed', the killing a 'vanquish[ing]', and the blood the 'red/Sweet wine of youth'.[30]

Contributing to this imagining of war as a romantic, chivalric quest, were countless public speeches and newspaper articles that presented the war as a moral crusade, one that would thankfully restore the nation's ideals, as Britain had supposedly grown 'too comfortable' from 'living in a sheltered valley for generations'.[31] Speaking to his Queen's Hall audience on 19 September 1914, David Lloyd George declared: 'Fate has scourged us to a elevation where we can see the great everlasting things that matter to a nation; the great peaks we had forgotten—Duty and Patriotism, clad in glittering white, the great pinnacle of Sacrifice pointing like a rugged finger to heaven'.[32] These abstract concepts—honour, duty, patriotism—and the images that supported and solidified them, had long been important to the nation's collective sense of self. On 6 August 1914, Prime Minister Herbert Asquith stood before the House, stating:

> I do not believe any nation ever entered into a great controversy […] with a clearer conscience and a stronger conviction that it is fighting, not with aggression, not for the maintenance even of its own

[29] 'Daddy, what did YOU do in the Great War?', 1915, Parliamentary Recruiting Committee, Poster No. 79, IWM, Art. PST 3011; 'To the Young Women of London', 1915, PRC, Poster No. 108, IWM, Art. PST 4903.
[30] Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975; Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000), p. 21-23.
[31] David Lloyd George, 'Honour and Dishonour. A Speech at the Queen's Hall, London, September 19, 1914' (London: Methuen & Co., 1914).
[32] Ibid.

> selfish interest, but […] in defence of principles the maintenance of which is vital to the civilization of the world.[33]

Here, with powerful conviction, Britain's role in the war is framed as reasonable, just, and honourable. Belgium, in turn, becomes a symbol; the small, defenceless nation, violated by a strong and ruthless attacker, stands for civilization itself. By late August, as graphic reports of German atrocities appeared in every paper—telling salacious stories of rape, mutilation, and murder—opposition to the war was reduced to a small minority, while the pre-war civil battles of suffragettes and trade unionists were effectively halted.[34] As one Irish propaganda poster declared: 'IT WILL BE TOO LATE TO FIGHT WHEN THE ENEMY IS AT YOUR DOOR'.[35] In this context, the British soldier's script, of gentlemanly chivalry, and of moral self-control, was juxtaposed against that of unrestrained German barbarity. Framed in this language, the soldier's script was both highly appealing, and difficult to refute.[36] As the sights and sounds of this 'just and honourable' war proliferated—with the soldier's heroic script as its keystone—the young civilian man was forced to consider the nature of his 'duty'.

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[33] *Manchester Guardian*, 7 August 1914.

[34] On 25 August 1914, the British government issued *The Belgian Official Report*, which summarized, in graphic detail, the atrocities committed by German soldiers against Belgium civilians. Subsequent articles centring on acts German barbarity would continue throughout the war. It should also be noted, with regards to war opposition, that there were, without question, staunch pacifists, such a Sylvia Pankhurst, who refused to be silenced throughout the war's duration. As casualty numbers steadily rose, and war weariness took hold, audiences of pacifist views undoubtedly grew.

[35] Anonymous, 'Is Your Home Worth Fighting For?', 1915, Poster no. 661, IWM, Art. PST 13623. The significant differences between Irish and English patriotism and recruitment should be noted here. As Irish society and politics had been long-shaped by the issue of Home Rule, Ireland had its own Central Recruiting Council. Furthermore, recent scholarship has highlighted 'group affiliations and collective pressure' as being particularly significant to Irish Recruitment. David Fitzpatrick argues that '[t]he readiness of individuals to join the colours was largely determined by the attitudes and behaviour of comrades—kinsmen, neighbours, and fellow members of organizations and fraternities'. (Fitzpatrick, 'The Logic of Collective Sacrifice: Ireland and the British Army, 1914-18', *The Historical Journal*, 38.4 (1995), pp. 104-30).

[36] This is not to suggest that men were unknowing and naive victims of propaganda. As revisionist scholars such as Catriona Pennell, Stephane Audoin-Rouzeau, and Annette Becker have argued, the vast majority of the population—including many of its popular writers—supported the war. To suggest that the nation was simply manipulated, or coerced, is to misrepresent the circular nature of propaganda. The posters that beckoned from 'every taxi-cab […], in every shop window, and on every hoarding' were at their most potent when they reflected values already supported by the general populace. Catriona Pennell, *A Kingdom United: Popular Responses to the Outbreak of the First World War in Britain and Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012), p. 7. Stephane Audoin-Rouzeau, and Annette Becker, *1914-18 Understanding the Great War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2002), pp. 98-99.

And yet, while rarely acknowledged, roughly forty-percent of the male population—between the ages of nineteen and forty-nine—would (or had to) choose to stay at home. This was a choice made in the face of jeers in the street, professional reprimands, and, the ultimate humiliation, young ladies wielding white feathers. The masculine identities of these men, men who chose alternate scripts—as fathers, husbands, professionals, pacifists, conscientious objectors, for example—would require navigation, and often, repeated validation and justification. Recalling his experiences as a pacifist in 1914, Lord Allen, Chairman of the No-Conscription Fellowship, writes:

> May I put the case in a rather personal way? I was only 25 years old. Within a fortnight politics swept down upon me, not as a matter of academic interest or theoretical propaganda, but as a series of terrible events in the midst of which many millions of young men had to make a decision which was personal in character. Taken unawares, and without preparation, all of us between the years of nineteen and thirty-five, had to make up our minds as to what we honestly meant by patriotism and Socialism, what our attitude to peace and war really was, and what significance we attached to the word 'liberty'. Moreover, we had to do all this, faced by the issue of life and death.
>
> Those of us, who under these exceptional circumstances felt it necessary to resist the emotion and passion which swept over the nation, had to face a loneliness which perhaps can never be fully understood by the youth of today […][37]

There were, of course, degrees of alienation and ostracisation. The conscientious objector, seen as the heroic soldier's antithesis, received the harshest treatment. In any case, as argued by Trudi Tate, 'civilian men found themselves in an odd negated space in relation to masculinity'.[38] These public scripts—both those celebrated and maligned—provided individual men with a language through which to create, or lend shape, to their own wartime identities, whether in accordance or dissent. Indeed, as the war relentlessly celebrated, and romanticised, the actions of the soldier, men were left to construct personal narratives that functioned in securing, validating, and/or, defending their individual wartime identities, even if just to/for themselves.

I will turn now to an examination of the life-writing of individual men—both soldier and civilian—focusing, in particular, on the tensions at play between the inner 'sense of self' and the

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[37] Lord Allen of Hertford, 'Pacifism: Then and Now', *We Did Not Fight: 1914-1918 Experiences of War Resisters*, ed. by Julian Bell (London: Cobden-Sanderson, 1935), p. 26.
[38] Trudi Tate, *Women, Men and the Great War: An Anthology of Stories* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1995), p. 5.

mounting external pressures that surrounded. Speaking of the diary, Felicity Nussbaum writes that it 'becomes necessary at the point when the subject begins to believe that it cannot be intelligible to itself without written articulation and representation'.[39] In order to highlight the role of personal, or private, composition in both the creation—and reframing—of men's wartime identities, the analysis will be divided by life-writing's various functions, first for the newly enlisted soldier, and second, for the civilian.

II. Life-Writing, declaration, and self-creation—establishing 'narrative threads'

i. The newly enlisted soldier

In previous studies of men's private and personal writing in war, the phrases 'combatant diary' or 'trench letter' abound, suggesting, inadvertently, *a single* form of each text, perhaps a leather-bound volume of substantial page count, and/or a few mud-covered leaves, containing messages of either longing or dread. This, however, was not always the case; while some men did carry the more traditional diary, others wrote in small pocket books, unlined notebooks, as well as small dated 'appointments diaries'—which offered roughly two-inches of white space. The length, descriptive quality, and frequency of letters is equally diverse. For a great number of men, the letter written home was an escape, a place to conjure its comforts and to thereby reconnect to family—as well as pre-war facets of identity. And yet, for others, letter writing was a habit, a demand, and a chore, a promise made to a mother, or sister. While rarely acknowledged, this diversity is significant. The diary or letter's form can be a determinant of its function—on both home and battlefront. A dated diary, for example, compels some men to write, its divided structure rendering blank pages—unrecorded days—blatant; this, for some, elicits guilt: 'Many days have clipped by since I last wrote

[39] Felicity Nussbaum, 'Toward Conceptualizing Diary', *Studies in Autobiography*. ed. James Olney (New York: Oxford UP, 1988), p. 135.

in […] this Diary (so called)', self-consciously writes E.W. Hewish from the home front.[40] It can also be intimately related to class. Generally speaking, men of higher socio-economic backgrounds, and thus higher levels of education, wrote more. Frontline nurse Eleonora Pemberton, reflects on her first-hand experience of this challenge; 'The longer I am here, the more sorry I am for the poor Tommies' home people. […] [H]e has neither pens, ink nor paper, even if he feels well enough to write and as many of them have said when I have asked them — "I'm not much good at writing, Sister — *you* write for me"'.[41] Pemberton's observation gestures toward a simple, but important, fact: neither brevity, nor ineloquence should be taken to mean that an experience holds less significance for the writer, or that it has less emotional impact. Indeed, the opposite is often true; 'to be silent is still to speak', assert Efrat Ben-Ze'ev, Ruth Ginio, and Jay Winter in *Shadows of War: A Social History of Silence in the Twentieth Century*.[42] With this in mind, I will first consider the function of the more scant forms of men's war diaries, those generally overlooked in scholarship: the small 'appointments diary' or the brief 'date book', which each offer only a few inches of white space. These texts too reflect a desire to assert, to declare, and to connect to the newly militarized identity. Indeed, it is telling that even in these books of the most basic, briefest form—generally containing only useful reminders and/or remarks on the weather—the day of enlistment is noted. The individual was compelled, in other words, to mark the day/moment he transitioned from civilian to soldier, at least on paper.

'Enlisted at Monmouth Castle. Philip Howe and myself enlisted together', writes H.E. Brooks in his diary on 8 September 1914.[43] F.S. Collings 'attested in the Honourable Artillery. City

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[40] Captain E.W. Hewish, diary, IWM, Documents. (02/43/1).
[41] Eleonora Pemberton, cited in Eva Figes, ed., *Women's Letters in Wartime, 1450-1945* (London: Pandora, 1993), pp. 13-14.
[42] Efrat Ben-Ze'ev, Ruth Ginio and Jay Winter, *Shadows of War: A Social History of Silence in the Twentieth Century* (Cambrigde: Cambridge UP, 2010), p. 3.
[43] H.E Brooks, diary, 8 September 1914, IWM, Documents. 12685 (03/30/1).

Road. 1st Batt[alion] Infantry on 12 September'.[44] J.S. Gately documents his re-enlistment with his 'old Battalion the 7th Manchester' on 30 August.[45] While such men choose not to detail the context of their enlistment, this need to at least mark the occasion is significant. Though undoubtedly a small gesture, it is nonetheless a personal assertion of the individual's new role and commitment to the state. It is also, in turn, a small form of personal, and *private*, self-positioning, a claiming of the new identity. There is, for many of us, something undeniably reassuring and calming about transcribing a fact, event, fear, or goal, to paper. It is perhaps related to the same sense of satisfaction one gets from making—and marking off—lists. The act of committing something personal to the blank page—'I enlisted'—focuses and sharpens one's recognition and resolve. There is something in the visible (and tangible) transference—of thought, through ink, to paper—that lends a sense of commitment, a solidification. In these moments, in the midst of near-constant public discussion of men's 'duty', 'patriotism', and 'honour', these individuals were compelled to take a private moment to position themselves, their new role, and their commitment, in time, and, subsequently—as propaganda frequently reminds them—in history. It is also a moment where new allegiances are declared, as men often proudly listed their new battalion and/or divisional markers—such markers being facets of the new militarized identity. For the civilian man, the listing of such detail perhaps serves as a small form of affirmation, as his identity must now align with that of the soldier. As Rowland Luther recalls, 'I was now to be known as 28933 Driver R.M. Luther, of the Royal Field Artillery Regiment'.[46] Finally, as men were constantly reminded that they were being offered 'a role in history', it at least provided a tangible (and potentially posthumous) answer to the public's

[44] F.S. Collings, diary, 12 September 1914, IWM, Documents. 7113 (77/124/1).
[45] J.S. Gately, diary, 30 August 1914, IWM, Documents. 15727 (07/40/1).
[46] Rowland Luther, *The Poppies are Blood Red*, memoir, IWM, Documents, 1325 (87/8/1), p. 3.

constant questioning—ARE YOU IN THIS?; WHAT WILL YOUR ANSWER BE WHEN YOUR BOY ASKS […]?'.[47]

I will turn now to the function of life-writing texts of more traditional, and substantial form. Indeed, the space offered by more substantial diary forms—as well as by the letter's multiple pages—often inspires more creative 'self-presentation'. Here, the story of enlistment is often granted greater detail, as men draw the initial parameters of their newly militarized role—this being a first phase of self-redefinition in war. Men are able to try out and/or rehearse the various social scripts of the heroic soldier, as they seek to authenticate this new facet of their identity. For some, generally younger, middle- and upper-class men, the day of enlistment is framed by reference to a romanticised past. It is the day they become 'players in history', joining the proud procession of knights that came before. For C.W. Beaumont, for example, war enlistment meant 'taking part in the old French wars, the days of knighthood and cavalry when lance met lance and sword met sword'.[48] For A.D. Gillespie it was a 'great privilege to save the traditions of all the centuries behind us'.[49] Writing from South Africa, Julian Grenfell imagined that, 'It must be wonderful to be in England now […] It reinforces one's failing belief in the Old Flag and the Mother Country […] which gets rather shadowy in peace time, don't you think?'.[50] These men, raw from school or new employment, thus turned to constructions of the soldier that were familiar, drawing on martial metaphors and alluding to ancient mythologies in order to rhetorically authenticate the newly militarized, masculine identity.

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[47] Robert S. Baden Powell, 'Are YOU in this?', 1915, Parliamentary Recruiting Committee, Poster No. 112, IWM, Art. PST 2712. Anonymous, 'What Will Your Answer Be—What did YOU do to help when Britain Fought for Freedom in 1915?', 1915, Essex County Recruiting Committee Poster No. 61, IWM, Art. PST 12476.
[48] Cited in Anthony Fletcher, *Life, Death and Growing Up on the Western Front* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2013) p. 46.
[49] A.D. Gillespie, letter, 1 October 1914, *Letters From the Front, 1914-1918*, ed. by John Laffin (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1973), p. 12.
[50] Julian Grenfell, letter, August 1914, *Julian Grenfell: His Life and the Times of His Death, 1888-1915*, ed. by Nicholas Mosley (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1976), p. 230.

The unpublished diary of one young recruit, W.T. Colyer, captures the experiences of many men in the early months of the war. An ex-public schoolboy from Merchant Taylors, he had rushed from his London office to Duke Street, Euston, where he joined the Artists' Rifles on 5 August 1914. His diary—which actually appears to be a complex, hybrid form of diary and memoir—recalls his initial thoughts the morning after war was declared:

> Would they invade us, I wondered. By George! If they should they'd find us a tougher nut to crack than they had expected.
>
> My bosom swelled and I clenched my fist. I wished to goodness I were in the Army now. What a fool I had been to ignore the circular…If I had listened then, I might have been with the British Expeditionary Force just gone to France…I wondered what they were doing now. Probably engaged in some terrific fight which we shall hear about tomorrow. […]
>
> And then the impulse came, sending the blood tingling over all my body: why not join the Army now? A great and glorious suggestion. It might not be too late.[51]

The pride and excitement in this passage is palpable. Colyer's use of emotionally-charged language—'a great and glorious suggestion'—highlights his internalization of the period's heroic rhetoric. Indeed 'Glory' was a staple of the high tradition, a staple that would be famously mocked by Wilfred Owen later in the war. That same evening, he found himself in the crowded headquarters of the Artists' Rifles, surrounded by 'fellows obviously bound on the same mission'. He describes his future fellow soldiers as having 'an eager light in their eyes which beckoned the ardent impelling force within'.[52] Colyer's elevated, if not bombastic, language reveals his romantic illusions not only about war, but about England. Conditioned by the imperialist values of the public school system, he believed wholeheartedly in both the justice of the British cause and the 'natural superiority of the British people'.[53] As such, he was eager to cast himself in the role of heroic soldier and to 'offer

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[51] W.T. Colyer, diary/memoir, IWM, Documents. 7256, p. 314-315. It should be noted that Colyer's diary is in fact part diary and part memoir in form. Colyer appears to have copied his war experiences from his diaries into 3 bound, handwritten books, in which he has occasionally added retrospective comments. Additionally, large sections of the texts are unnumbered and are without specific dating.

[52] Ibid., p. 322.

[53] It should be noted here that Colyer's elevated language is also likely tied to his desire (whether conscious or not) for posterity. Later in the diaries, for example, he directly addresses the implied reader. Furthermore, the cultural context of

himself up on the…altar of his country's honour, so to speak'.[54] The heroic model is explained by the fact that middle-class men like Colyer were educated through a selective syllabus, which focused on the Empire's past successes. This syllabus also included moral lessons 'of both battlefield and life', argue J.A. Mangan and James Walvin. Boys were 'taught through games-playing and [an] endless stream of poems, rhymes and songs which were rife with the language and metaphor of self-sacrifice and character development'.[55] The playing of competitive games was thought to prepare England's future leaders for their imperial duties. As declared by a contributor to the extremely popular, *Boys Own Paper* in 1892: 'One thing is certain, and may as well be at once admitted, that as long as England wishes to maintain her supremacy and reputation as a great nation, our boys must be trained in those games which develop physical strength, endurance, skill and courage'.[56]

Conditioned by various public scripts to view war as the greatest 'game' he could partake in, it is not surprising that Colyer was 'restless, excited, [and] eager to do something desperate for the cause of England'. It is even less surprising that his writing depicts what he describes as a new and revitalized 'sense of self' after 'the great deed was done'. Indeed, his elevated language reveals a desire to authenticate not only his patriotic enlistment, but also the 'proper' masculine identity it signifies and secures. Drawing a revealing comparison between enlistment and a marriage proposal, he writes: 'I went home throbbing with a new vitality, as (I imagine) a man might who had just plighted his troth to the girl he had loved at first sight'. The simile is telling; it equates enlistment—a requirement of wartime masculinity—with an equally affirming 'manly' milestone, one frequently promoted by the heterosexual constructions of masculinity examined here: marriage. Furthermore, the reference is clearly a sexual one; his '*throbbing* with a new vitality', suggests arousal at the thought

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his retrospection may have also coloured his description. The citation is taken from Peter Simkins' book, *Kitchener's Army: the Raising of the New Armies, 1914-1916* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2007), p. 168.

[54] Ibid., p. 322.

[55] J.A. Mangan and James Walvin, eds., *Manliness and Morality: Middle-class masculinity in Britain and America 1800-1940* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1987), p. 10.

[56] Quoted by John Springhill, 'Building character in the British Boy', *Manliness and Morality*, p. 67.

of war. And of course, he, like many others who had 'plighted their troth' to king and country in early 1914, was amply rewarded for performing the 'proper' masculine scripts:

> So home I went each evening, with my rifle on my shoulder. As I walked through the streets people looked admiringly at me, and I felt more than ever pleased with myself. Girls smiled at me, men looked at me with respect, the bus-drivers wished me luck and refused to take money for my fare, and everybody made way for me, as being on the King's business.[57]

While the army's severe shortage of accommodation and materials in the early months of the war meant that Colyer could not yet don the newly ordained symbol of militarized masculinity—the khaki uniform—his rifle, for the time being, was enough to mark him as a man.

Colyer's romantic illusions of war here reveal a fundamental assumption held by many—an assumption rooted in the soldier's idealized behavioural script: the war would provide countless opportunities for individual displays of courage and bravery. Indeed, his image is of *active* combat, of exciting battles with clear and swift victories. The heroic knight wields a sword, the cavalry charges the foe. Such excitement and enthusiasm—common, though certainly not universal in civilian recruits—often continued though training and transport to the front. Charles May, Captain of the 22nd Battalion of The Manchester Regiment, writes of his men's excitement for battle in November 1915: 'Promise [the men] a regular hell of a time in France and you can't please them better. Their keenness to go is marvellous and I trust will hold when they get there'.[58] In his diary on 21 February 1915, H.T. Clements, a Private, highlights a similarity between the officers and the ranks; he writes of his unit's growing enthusiasm as they march toward the front for the first time. After proudly relaying his excitement at his unit's being 'taken for regular troops', he assures the assumed reader—perhaps a future self—that 'the nearer we reached the firing line, the higher our spirits rose'.[59] Viewing the war as a test of their manhood, these men reflect excitement and a desire to

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[57] Ibid., p. 330.
[58] Charles May, letter, *To Fight Alongside Friends: The First World War Diaries of Charlie May*, ed. by Gerry Harrison (London: Harper Collins, 2014), p. 2.
[59] H.T. Clements, diary, 21 February 1915, IWM, Documents. 3413.

authenticate the newly militarized, masculine identity. In Colyer's words, 'We wanted to be up and doing things. We wanted to be real soldiers, not theatrical representations of them'.[60] Of course, neither Clements nor Colyer could imagine what their role as 'real' soldier would entail. Tales of glorious charges and personal victories were a feature of past wars, wars that has been romanticized by the public schools. In seeking shape and clarity for their new wartime identity as heroic soldier, these largely public-schooled men thus turned to readily available social and cultural scripts. Their early narratives and/or performances of identity are woven with the language of poetry and the abstract rhetoric of nation, thereby aiding in the construction of a romanticised sense of identity, one that is just, moral, and brave. 'You might send out my Kipling poems', requests Lieutenant Lloyd of his wife.[61]

While both the diary and the letter can function as sounding boards, a site where this newly militarised and romanticised identity can be shaped and bolstered, the letter is more suited to those who seek confirmation. 'Subjective composure', argues Graham Dawson, 'fundamentally depends upon social recognition'.[62] When the individual is removed from those who know him best—from those most capable of providing confirmation—the desire for self-assurance is heightened; this desire increases exponentially when the individual is placed under threat. Once newly enlisted men reached the front, seeing its terrains and glimpsing its destructive capacity, their conceptions of self often required alteration and further confirmation. After his first experience of shelling, Lieutenant A.S. Lloyd, writes a letter to his wife:

> I went up this morning to the observation station […] [O]f course as soon as I got there, they must needs start shelling & I got my "baptism" alright & didn't mind a bit. they dropped shells all round & some fell within 15 yards of me. It is quite alright, I could have slipped into my dugout at once if things had looked bad. I did wish Humphries had been there! So, I'm the first to come under fire!.[63]

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[60] Colyer, p. 331.
[61] Lieutenant A.S. Lloyd, letter, IWM, Documents. 20535.
[62] Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 23.
[63] Lieutenant A. S. Lloyd, letter, IWM, Documents. 20535.

While this letter is undoubtedly meant, in part, to comfort his wife, assuring her of his safety, it also functions as a site for self-confirmation. Indeed, there is a boy-like pride in his assertion that he 'didn't mind a bit'. Before their first experience of the front, newly enlisted men wrote often of their anxiety over whether they could 'play the man'.[64] Writing to his mother in April 1916, B.A. Reader seeks such confirmation from his mother: 'I was on Sentry during the strafe and of course I had to stand upright. Afterwards I was told that I had stood it very well. One of the chaps, about 25years old, who came out on our draft lost his nerve and laid in the mud groaning and crying the whole time'.[65] Successfully withstanding the 'baptism of fire' marked an important first stage in the solidification of the 'soldier self', a self that, in turn, sought confirmation from its personal 'defining community'.[66]

ii. The unenlisted, civilian man

Writing amid a cultural climate that positioned the heroic soldier as the masculine epitome of strength and honour, the civilian man's search for validation and confirmation is, arguably, more fraught. This was true not only for men of military age, but also for those well outside it. As increasing numbers of young men crossed the channel, popular magazines frequently referred to the home front as absent of men entirely, men outside of military age here not even warranting mention. *Punch*, on 5 July 1916, printed a cartoon entitled 'Adamless Eden-on-Sea', which depicted the replacement of young men by well-dressed tailor's dummies, who placidly lean on a waterfront rail as young women pass by.[67] Older men, along with those unfit for service, were thus 'a redundant male population', only claiming some sense of glory, or presence, indirectly—if they had a serving

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[64] Coningsby Dawson, letter, 30 August 1916, p. 38.
[65] B.A. Reader, letter, 28 April 1916, IWM, Documents. 4127 (83/3/1).
[66] Michele Crossley, *Introducing Narrative Psychology: Self, Trauma, and the Construction of Meaning* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2000), p. 40.
[67] 'An Adamless Eden-on-Sea', *Punch*, 5 July 1915.

son, for example.[68] In this context, wherein men above military age are either relegated or overlooked entirely, there was often a desire and/or need on the part of the individual to create, and then bolster, alternate forms of valid patriotic manhood. It is the diaries of these older, middle- and upper-class men that are a central focus here, men who were excluded from the heroic script. On the pages of their personal texts, these men both create and perform (or rehearse) multiple identities for which they both seek and assert confirmation and justification, including that of reporter (or chronicler), policer, father, and husband. In the sections that follow, I will examine each of these identities, along with life-writing's role in their construction and navigation, beginning with the reporter.

The reporter, or 'foreign correspondent'

In her recent book, *Conceiving Strangeness*, Clare Buck highlights how combatants negotiate the war's transformations through the conventions of travelogue. 'Writers as various as John Masefield, Siegfried Sassoon, Edmund Blunden, and Enid Bagnold', she argues, 'produce histories, memoirs, fiction, and poetry about the war that either take the form of travelogues or incorporate tropes and conventions from the genre'.[69] The same is true for non-literary men and women. In a letter to his sister, Coningsby Dawson, for example, writes: 'It seemed to me that I must be coming on one of those romantic holidays to see churches and dead history—only the khaki-clad figures reminded me that I was coming to see history in the making'.[70] This letter, describing France as a place of *patisseries* and *gateaux*—a conventional depiction of aesthetic appreciation and sensibility—ends with the quintessential traveller's cliché: 'I wish you were here'.[71] The tropes and conventions of travelogue,

[68] Lois Bibbings, 'Images of Manliness: The Portrayal of Soldiers and Contentious Objectors in the Great War', *Social and Legal Studies* 12.3 (2003), p. 347.
[69] Claire Buck, *Conceiving Strangeness in British First World War Writing* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p. 46.
[70] Dawson, letter, 1 September 1916, *Khaki Courage*, pp. 42-43.
[71] Ibid., p.43

however, are used not only by soldiers, but also by civilians at home. Indeed, the rapid social and cultural changes wrought by the war's declaration had made home, for many, a kind of foreign place. On the pages of their diaries, civilian men often play the role of 'foreign correspondent', or reporter. It is through documenting, meticulously, the war's events that these men assert and create valid identities as patriotic male citizens. They become the war's faithful scribes, or chroniclers, documenting the nation's victories and losses for a future generation, while also asserting, and highlighting, the 'proper' roles, actions, and behaviours of men and women on the home front.

It seems the war must take precedence on the diary page of the self-appointed chronicler—this, in itself, being a small gesture of patriotism, or perhaps penance, for their far safer position in war. Indeed, here, the personal recedes; it is mentioned only as an afterthought, if at all. Beginning his diary for 1917, E.W. Hewish confides that he considered 'abandon[ing] the effort', 'but the months have been so full by incidents worth recording', that he decides to continue on as faithful reporter. In his words, 'I [will] have not much difficulty in racking my brains to find "copy".[72] He then goes on to list the 'larger' events of the war's news—the actions of the barbarous Hun, rations, and recent victories as printed in the paper—before turning to more 'personal' matters, his frontline brother's recent letter and his own training; the former (war news) spans almost three diary pages, the latter (the personal, though war-related) roughly fifteen lines.[73] Similarly devoting only scant reference to the personal, the diary of Harold Cossins provides an almost daily transcription of the war's headlines. On the 1 September 1914, for example, his diary tidily begins:

> The German advance is being pushed forward especially against the Allies left wing. They are now 68 miles from Paris which is preparing for a siege. In Lorraine the French seems to have met with some success, but the battle now being waged along the whole front has been going on for three days and very little news has come through. […]. My daily entries would be incomplete without a reference to the Russian story […]'.[74]

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[72] Captain E.W. Hewish, diary, 22 February 1917, IWM, Documents. (02/43/1).
[73] Hewish, extremely eager to 'take a man's part in this show', eventually completes training and becomes a Captain.
[74] Harold Cossins, diary, 1 September 1914, IWM, Documents. PP/MCR/371.

Meticulous knowledge of the war's events here signals a patriotic commitment on the part of the writer. Indeed, he, like fellow 'reporter' C.F. Harriss, writes so that future generations can better understand this 'new epoch of existence'.[75] In this way, the civilian man too performs a duty for future generations, a goal frequently asserted by combatants in the war's early months; 'it is expedient that a few men should suffer that all generations to come may be better', writes the newly trained Coningsby Dawson.[76] Reflecting the language of newspapers and political speeches, these diaries also speak of the nation and the war using collective, inclusive terms. '*We* are at war!', writes C.F. Harriss; '[O]ne thing is on *our* side, The Right', asserts W.E. Pead. This language illuminates the internalization of public scripts of patriotic citizenship, which cited the vital importance of the *entire* population's contribution and support.[77]

Like many period reporters, these diarists frequently include 'eye-witness' accounts—though this was largely the case in the war's early months, before the sight of khaki, for example, had become commonplace. 'More refugees have been arriving from Belgium, and are seen all over London; I had to direct one myself to the Bank of England', writes Harold Cossins in September 1914.[78] In late August, C.F. Harriss's diary crosses with a kind of investigative (if not sensationalist) journalism, providing evidence that may confirm persistent rumours of 'Russian troops' in England; '[M]y Wife tells me that, "the daughter of the woman at the egg shop" has herself <u>seen</u> about 500 Russians in a train near Birmingham'.[79] Later, in September, he appears to 'go on assignment', travelling to a Brighton grammar school that has been converted into a Military Hospital where wounded men from the battle of Mons are being treated:

> Went up there one day and saw many sunning themselves in the grounds and wearing

[75] C.F. Harriss, diary, 4 August 1914, IWM, Documents. 14429 (67/87/1).
[76] Dawson, letter, 19 August 1916, p. 32.
[77] C.F. Harriss, diary, 4 August 1914, IWM, Documents. 14429 (67/87/1); W.E. Pead, diary, 12 August 1914, IWM. Documents. (06/28/1), p. 5.
[78] Cossins, 16 September 1914.
[79] Harriss, 31 August 1914.

> the bright blue military hospital uniform, but regimental caps, mostly of Highland fashion. We were not allowed in the grounds, but had a few words with one or two through high iron fencing.[80]

Evidently recognising the voyeuristic, if not ridiculous, nature of this scene, along with the threat this 'coverage' might have to his role a chronicler, he shrewdly critiques the actions of others who have also visited the hospital; others 'thrust' 'gifts of packets of cigarette […] through the bars, as one gives nuts to monkeys at the zoo'.[81] Directly addressing the imagined future reader for whom he writes, he later self-consciously counters this scene with praise for Brighton's new recruits—a report that, in turn, reasserts his own identity as patriotic citizen and balanced, thorough chronicler:

> Lest it be thought that an impression of Brighton at this time was one merely of 'pleasure as usual', garnished with war fables, I must add that it was a very stirring sight […] to see long companies of recruits marching in fours along the streets engaged in the first stage of training for the Front. […] [T]heir appearance in civilian dress very much emphasized the spirit of self-sacrifice.[82]

Constantly reminded by politicians and by the newspapers that they had rushed to obtain that this war 'imposed a strict obligation upon every citizen', middle-class men like Harriss, Cossins, and Pead shaped, and validated, identities as the war's chroniclers or reporters.[83] For these men, the keeping of a diary is itself 'a duty', which too is undertaken for future generations.

The policer and fighting 'enemies' at home

For some men, the 'duty' of the chronicler combines with that of policer. Indeed, middle-aged civilian diarists often observe, record, and criticize the actions of young, unenlisted men. Such unfavourable judgment functions in positioning the writer in a superior position; his identity as moral and patriotic man is solidified as he 'does his bit' to battle a form of 'enemy' at home: shirkers. Writing on the 25 August 1914, W.E. Pead, for example, reports:

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[80] Ibid., 22 September 1914.
[81] Ibid., 22 September 1914.
[82] Ibid., 22 September 1914.
[83] 'The Citizen's Duty', *The Times*, 3 May 1915.

> A large part of the population does not appear to realize the seriousness of the situation. Seated in front of us in […] were four sturdy young men in the prime of early manhood. They did not appear to think that the call to arms applied to them in any way nor did they seem to be in the least interested in the war news. They spent the ride singing comic songs and in chaffing passers bye. And they are typical of many others at present'.[84]

This policing was, however, also turned inward. After transcribing the losses at Ypres, as reported in *The Times*, Pead writes: 'It seems outrageous that we should be living quietly at home with this titanic struggle only just beyond our gates'.[85] Later, in the same year, he writes of his guilt at having taken an 'idle holiday', a holiday whose events—however brief—are not included in his *war* diary,

> We decided to return home today although our visit […] was to have continued until next Monday. I did not like to stay longer enjoying an idle holiday while so many of my countrymen are working and fighting for our country.[86]

Ever-conscious of his diary's future reader, Pead here reasserts his identity as patriotic citizen, one whose demonstrated commitment to the war simultaneously protects his role as policer from potential charges of hypocrisy.

The husband and father

While many older men thus used their diaries to find shape and definition for alternate forms of valid wartime identity, others continue to keep their pre-war domestic roles—as husbands, fathers, and providers—at centre. The varying degrees to which public scripts were internalized become clear here. The diary of Thomas Livingston provides an example. Livingston, a father to an infant son, a husband to a frequently ill wife, and a clerk, documents no desire or intention to enlist. He does, however, eventually attest, after withstanding—and recording—a variety of compounding pressures; 'Got a love letter from Lord Derby egging me on to enlist before they make me', he

[84] W.E. Pead, diary, 25 August 1914, IWM, Documents. (06/28/1), p. 10.
[85] Ibid., 5 March 1914, p. 55.
[86] Ibid., 3 September 1914, p. 14.

writes on 1 November 1915, with characteristic irony.[87] This entry also closely follows a detailed sketch of himself in military uniform, looking distinctly unimpressed, if not defiant—hands in pockets and slouched, smoking a pipe.[88] In the daily entries leading up to, and following his attestation, however, Livingstone's diary depicts, and navigates, an identity that is first and foremost a husband and father. Indeed, the vast majority of 'self-portraits' he includes in the diary present him in civilian dress, these images perhaps serving as their own form of self-assertion and/or self-declaration. In any case, the diary for Livingstone is largely a ritual; it is a private nightly endeavour, wherein he briefly recounts each day's most significant feature, be it wee Tommy's (his son's) latest accomplishment—'Tommy got new slippers today and <u>blew his nose</u>!!!!!!!'—his daily routines—'I gave Agnes [(his wife)] her usual cup of tea at 7a.m.'—or his wife's latest health issue—'Doctor in. Agnes to stay in bed'.[89] The personal and domestic here dominates the page, while the war's major battles, casualty numbers, and early recruitment calls, intrude. 'Agnes and Tommy [visited] Lighthill Cemetery in afternoon. Made Tommy a wooden sword. Another zeppelin raid on east coast. No damage'.[90] In contrast to the other civilian diarists examined here, Livingstone appears to remain largely secure in his pre-war identity. This is not to suggest that his identity, as a man, and as a patriotic citizen is not troubled by the war's public scripts. Indeed, as pressures multiply—he documents seeing notices and posters, and has a recruitment sergeant knock on his door, for example—he too turns to the diary page to mitigate fear and anxiety. His primary concern does not appear to be for any potential loss of masculine or patriotic status, but rather, for a loss of life, a fear he attempts to mitigate, with characteristic humour, through admitting it to the diary page:

> Saturday, 15 August

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[87] Thomas Livingstone, diary, 1 November 1915, *Tommy's War: A First World War Diary, 1913-18*. ed. by Ronnie Scott. (London: Harper Press, 2008), p. 111.
[88] Ibid., 21 October 1915, p. 110.
[89] Ibid., 25 October 1915, p. 111; 23 April 1916, p. 140; 10 May 1916, p. 143.
[90] Ibid., 13 September 1915, p. 103.

> Agnes very ill all day. We went to Queen's park in the afternoon and on our return she collapsed, all out, dead beat, up the pole. In accordance with the law, we filled in our National Registration Papers. After that, my name will go on the 'pink form', after that the military will commandeer me, after that I'll go to the front, and after that I'll be killed I suppose. We are living in great times.[91]

For other men, as we shall see, the identities of father and husband required more self-justification and validation. In these cases, the diary both reflects and aids in the navigation of the threatened masculine identity.

IV. Life-writing, fear, and confession—when performance of public scripts is difficult, if not impossible

i. The soldier's fear

In *Memory, Narrative and the Great War*, David Taylor rightly argues that in primarily emphasizing bravery, strength, and prowess, dominant public scripts had 'made it very difficult to tell stories that centred on fear'.[92] Indeed, while the words 'duty', 'honour', and 'the right' are near-ubiquitous on the early diary pages of the public-schooled recruit, so too is the *absence* of fear's words—'afraid', 'scared', 'doubt', for example, rarely appear. Furthermore, while young men imagine taking part in victorious charges and abstract displays of strength and valour, the same subjective connection is withheld from war's other potential outcomes: death or maiming. This, of course, is not surprising; avoidance and selective omission are vital components in the composition of what Dan McAdams calls our 'personal myths'.[93] This, however, makes consideration of the silences, and/or subtleties, in men's early war writings ever more important; we must read 'between the lines' as it were. Indeed, men had subtly committed fears of death to the written page long before they had seen the

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[91] Ibid., 15 August 1915, p. 102.
[92] David Taylor, *Memory, Narrative and the Great War: Rifleman Patrick MacGill and the Construction of Wartime Experience* (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 2013), p. 58.
[93] Dan P. McAdams, *The Stories We Live By: Personal Myths and the Making of the Self* (New York and London: The Guilford Press, 1993), p. 12.

trenches.[94] These fears for one's personal safety, as well as for those left behind, are most often conveyed in letters. In these moments, it seems that what the writer most desires is the comfort and confirmation of a familiar audience. While the diary is, as Thomas Mallon notes, 'a very pliable priest', its 'absolution' is only as kind as the anxious writer permits.[95] The letter, in contrast, allows the troubled mind to seek a direct response, specifically from those who are most likely to provide comfort, counsel, and consolidation.

Writing on 23 July 1916, Dawson, composes an additional anxious letter to his family as he prepares to depart for the front:

> Halifax, July 23.
>
> My Dear Ones,
>
> We've spent all morning on the dock, seeing to our baggage, and have just got leave ashore for two hours […]. You are thinking of me this quiet Sunday morning at the ranch, and I of you. And I am wishing—As I wish, I stop and ask myself, "Would I be there if I could have my choice?" And I remember those lines of Emerson's which you quoted:
>
> > "Though love repine and reason chafe,
> > There comes a voice without reply,
> > 'Twere man's perdition to be safe,
> > When for the Truth he ought to die."
>
> I wouldn't turn back if I could, but my heart cries out against "the voice which speaks without reply".
>
> Things are growing deeper with me in all sorts of ways. Family affections stand out so desirably and vivid, like meadows green after rain. And religion means more. […]. I hope I come back again—I very much hope I come back again; there are so many finer things that I could do with the rest of my days—bigger things. But, if by any chance I should cross the seas to stay, you'll know that that also will be right and as big as anything that I could do with life, and something that you'll be able to be just as proud about as if I had lived […]
>
> Keep brave, dear ones, for all our sakes; don't let any of us turn to cowards, whatever ultimately happens. We've a tradition to live up to now that we have become a family of soldiers and sailors. […].
>
> God bless and keep you.
>
> Con.[96]

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[94] Before leaving Southampton, Lionel Sotheby hastily wrote a last will, quickly listing his few valued possessions for the family solicitor.[94] Lieutenant Colonel Herman enclosed a farewell poem in a letter to his wife as he left for the front 'in case of accidents'. Its beautiful and sombre lines read: ' "soldier of England, counted leal and true / I shall sleep well neath alien soil, dear heart, / Sleep well—and dream of you"' in Donald C. Richer, ed. 'Introduction', *Lionel Sotheby's Great War: Diaries and Letters from the Western Front (*Athens: Ohio UP, 1997), p. xx., Lieutenant Colonel E.W. Hermon, *For Love and Courage: The Letters of Lieutenant Colonel E.W. Hermon from the Western Front 1914-1917,* ed. by Anne Nason (London: Preface, 2008), p. 6. The poem, entitled 'Farwell', was written by Sheila E. Braine.

[95] Thomas Mallon, *A Book of One's Own: People and Their Diaries* (London: Pan Books, 1985), p. 204.

[96] Dawson, letter, 23 July 1916, *Khaki Courage*, p. 26.

In this highly self-conscious letter, Dawson's multiple identities are brought into conflict. As son and brother, he seeks reassurance from his family as he confronts the possibility, and fear, of death; 'my heart cries out against "'the voice which speaks without reply'"—this, an eloquent poetic rendering of fear, which functions in distancing Dawson from the grim realities of the thing itself. At the same time, as newly minted soldier and protector, he seeks simultaneously to *provide* reassurance. This tension between his desires as son and his perceived duty as soldier is found symbolized in the first paragraph's strategically placed dash: 'And I am wishing—As I wish, I stop and ask myself'. Herein lies an equally significant function of the letter in the war's early months. While offering a safe place for the subtle confession of fear, its epistolary form also demands performance from the writer. In writing a letter, one is ever-conscious of the expectations of the reader; the identity, or self, performed is dependent on the writer's relationship to the addressee. The letter, in short, offers Dawson a safe venue for the navigation of fear, as well as an opportunity to seek a narrative frame for his wartime identity as soldier. For Dawson, the narrative threads of this frame, which provide meaning, are three-fold, consisting of family, religion, and nation.

There was, of course, an additional fear, that, for some, was even more pressing than death. For these arguably more fortunate men—for whom death remained an abstract reality—the more pressing concern was found in their possible failure of war's great 'test' of manhood. This fear, though more ideological than physical, nonetheless posed a potent threat to identity. As such, it too elicits confession and requires navigation. In his diary in April of 1917, Captain E.W. Hewish confides:

> I am afraid this Diary is fast becoming a mere Chronological record of the big events of this War instead of a record of my personal feelings & experiences during this great crisis. I think it is chiefly because I have not yet been out to France or to one of the other battle fields. Until I have been out I fear I shall have no deep & lasting impressions to record.[97]

[97] Captain E.W. Hewish, diary, 25 April 1917, IWM, Documents. (02/43/1).

Fearing the presumed judgment of some future reader, Hewish questions his own authority on which to speak of war. Having not yet experienced the western front, or indeed any of the other battlefields, he has no clear role is the 'great crisis'. His inability to sacrifice through suffering troubles his sense of masculine identity. Writing in July 1917, he compares his brother's position at the front to the despised comfort and safety of his own: 'Poor old boy! What a night, & I sleeping soundly in my bed!! I feel a worm'.[98]

ii. The Civilian's fear

By virtue of being both the nation's saviour and ultimate sacrifice, the soldier—even if newly minted—was granted the *authority* to write about war. Indeed, while there is undoubtedly anxiety present on his diary pages regarding the expectations of his new role, there is no unease over his right to *keep a diary* in the first place. This anxiety, in contrast, is often present immediately—on the opening page—of the civilian diary, where men provide self-conscious justification of the text itself. 'I mean to keep a rough diary during the course of the war, in order to put on record the effect of such a war on the community at large and private individuals. It may be that I shall have nothing unusual to record […], self-consciously writes Harold Cossins on 4 August 1914.[99] This same anxiety is revisited by W.E. Pead in early April of 1915. He writes:

> Like most Diaries I have attempted to keep this one shows a tendency to fade away now that the first exciting events are over. For one thing my personal experiences are not very interesting and I am only taking a very humble part in our great struggle with Germany.[100]

This is a subtle form of confession. These men fear some imagined future reader, one that might question both the validity and value of their non-soldierly account—not an unfounded concern, as we now know. Indeed, few civilian memoirs were published in the war's aftermath, an absence that

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[98] Ibid., 19 July 1917.
[99] Cossins, 4 August 1914.
[100] Pead, 4 April 1915.

largely continues. The diary page, in these moments, offers a venue for the civilian man's simultaneous assertion and navigation of that fear. It also permits him some level of control over how his diary, and subsequently he himself, is read. These men seek some form of authority on which to speak of *their* war.

However, this anxiety, while present at the outset of the civilian diary, is not a constant, or dominant, presence throughout; like most fears, it exists in ebbs and flows. For Harold Cossins, thirty-six, married, and with a small child at the war's outbreak, the guilt and shame that accompanies this fear reaches its inevitable head in January of 1916—with the Derby scheme. Three passages, spaced roughly over a two-month span, display his attempts to navigate, and negotiate, these overlapping feelings on the written page. The diary here indeed functions as 'pliable priest', as Cossins self-consciously seeks approval, confirmation, and forgiveness.[101] The first entry, written in November of 1915, reveals his initial self-negotiation, which, eventually, leads to outright confession:

> 13 November 1915
>
> This afternoon I was canvassed in connection with Lord Derby's Recruiting Scheme. The canvasser's chief difficulty was to find room for a recital of my circumstances on his card, rendering it impossible for me to do more than I am doing at present by joining the Volunteers. These reasons included physical, financial, and business circumstances'.[102]

Highly self-conscious, this entry reflects a desire to both convince himself, and his imagined future reader, of the validity of his plethora of 'circumstances' that prevent him from enlisting. In later entries, as he transcribes the Derby's scheme's progression, his anxiety remains palpable—'The figure for married men ~~are~~ is 1, 152, 947, of which I no doubt am one'.[103] Two days later, on 6 January 1916, his sense of anxiety, and of shame, reaches its pitch; Perhaps I am a "slacker" myself,

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[101] Mallon, *A Book of One's* Own, p. 204.
[102] Cossins, 13 November 1915.
[103] Ibid., 4 January 1916.

however much I might be otherwise in other circumstances'.[104] Cossins here struggles to maintain his sense of identity as a patriotic citizen, and as a man, amid public scripts that exalted the militarized masculine hero, and, simultaneously, rendered redundant—and effeminate—those who remained unenlisted.

This chapter, considering the early life-writing of both new soldiers and civilians, has examined the role of life-writing in the creation, performance, and navigation of men's wartime identities. In the chapter that follows, I will examine the letter and the diary's functions as tools for the home front woman's similar creation and navigation of identity.

[104] Ibid., 6 January 1916.

CHAPTER TWO

'I MUST BUCK UP FOR YOUR DEAR SAKE': LIFE-WRITING AND THE HOME FRONT WOMAN'S PRIVATE PERFORMANCE, NAVIGATION AND REJECTION OF THE SCRIPTS OF 'PATRIOTIC WOMANHOOD'[1]

In August 1916, Lillie Scales, an upper-middle-class woman living in London, begins her war diary. Recognizing that this First World War 'would play an incredibly important part in the history of the nation', she begins by documenting the war's major events since its outbreak.[2] After briefly covering, with clear patriotic zeal, early recruitment, battle outcomes, Belgium refugees, and zeppelin raids, she turns to a positioning of *herself* in the midst of this rapid change: 'I would dearly have liked to take up regular war work but my time was already more than full with church work […]. [And] I should certainly have tried to do more […] if I had not had an enlarged thyroid gland which obliged me to take a good deal of rest for a year […] and I have now been hardly doing anything for 5 months, which is fairly sickening when everyone is so busy'.[3] This passage, a highly self-conscious one, is clearly written with an imagined—and seemingly highly critical—future reader in mind. Not unlike the civilian man of Chapter One, the home front urban woman, who was neither idolized nurse nor self-sacrificing mother, was too left to carve out a valid and valued patriotic identity, even if just for herself. The tensions arising from the limitations and contradictions of public scripts surrounding Patriotic Womanhood are here both reflected and navigated on the private, written page. In seeking to assert her role and contribution to the state, Scales draws on the widely-circulating language of sacrifice. On 5 February 1917, she writes:

> The war has touched many of us very little, and now is an opportunity for men and women who can't work for the country to show what they can do by abstinence. (I read in the paper the other day that it is only domestic servants and munitions workers who eat butter now. The rest of the people eat margarine. […] Numbers of people have stored sugar but it does not seem a patriotic thing to do, and one feels very angry that they are using so much sugar and corn for beer, on which no limit is set. […]. I have tried since the war began to be very economical in my clothes. I have not brought stockings or petticoats since the war began—only 2 pairs of suede gloves which are still quite good.

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[1] Edith (Edie) Bennett, letter, 11 August 1917, contained within the documents of E.S. Bennett (combatant), Imperial War Museum (hereafter IWM), Documents. 3695 (96/3/1). Hereafter cited as Edith Bennet.
[2] Peter Scales, 'Introduction', *A Home Front Diary, 1914-1918* (Stroud: Amberley Publishing, 2014), p.7.
[3] Lillie Scales, diary, August 1916, *A Home Front Diary, 1914-1918* (Stroud: Amberley Publishing, 2014), pp. 23-24.

> […]. The first 2 years I went to a dressmaker I knew for a silk dress, but they never looked smart or well cut and were (are) a great trial to me to wear (they seem as if they never will wear out, and because of the war I will wear them out). […] My black fox furs had got very shabby so I had them remade and they will look quite nice for another couple of years. We have not bought a single new thing for the house. Lampshades even I have made out of silk that I had, and we badly need to do some decorating now, but we don't mean to. All the money we can spare goes into the war loan (or to foreign missions!).[4]

A distinctly domestic patriotism is presented here. Scales is compelled to catalogue, and thereby preserve a record of, her personal sacrifices, as well as her determination to contribute—'I will wear them out', the underlining perhaps being both a performative mark of conviction (for her imagined audience) and/or a private self-assertion; the diary is, after all, a tool of self-improvement for some. In any case, in documenting the 'great trial[s]' she endures for the war, she simultaneously bolsters her identity as patriotic woman, a bolstering that is strengthened through classist comparison—'I read in the paper the other day that it is only domestic servants and munitions workers who eat butter now'. Forty-six at the war's outbreak, Lilie Scales and her upper-middle-class husband, could not directly join the war effort. The idealized roles of Heroic Soldier, Patriotic Mother, and Self-Sacrificial Nurse were reserved for the nation's younger members. This left older, but nonetheless patriotic citizens, to carve out alternate, but equally valid (and valuable) wartime identities—and this, in the midst of an 'epoch-making' moment, when '[E]very single man, woman, and child, if need be', is called upon to do 'whatever each individual is most capable of doing'.[5] It was also, in turn, a social moment were the more elite classes faced particular scrutiny, as overt displays of both leisure and luxury were deemed at best inappropriate, and at worst, unpatriotic. 'There is no escaping the spirit of eager work and concentration and self-denial', assures *The Times* in December 1914, 'it is well

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[4] Ibid., diary, 5 February 1917, pp. 50-54. Underlining in original.

[5] Michael Furse, 'Mobilize the Nation', *The Times*, 25 May 1915, p. 7. 'Epoch-making' is taken from the diary of another upper-middle-class woman named Ethel Bilbrough, *My War Diary, 1914-1918* (London: Ebury Press, 2014), p. 154. Phrases like 'epoch-making' moment, were frequently referenced in the popular press, reminding individual citizens that they were potential 'players in history'. The propaganda poster, 'Daddy, what did you do in the Great War', highlights the potential threat contained within such phrases. In this way, individuals were reminded that their actions and/or contributions would be considered (and judged) by future generations. This undoubtedly influenced how men and women privately wrote about the war. It is also likely related to the highly self-conscious self-presentation of civilians like Scales.

known that, of all the tradesmen that have suffered, the Bond-street retailers of luxury have been the hardest hit', the savings 'enabling [one] to send another check to a fund, or another motor-car to France or Belgium'.[6] Reflecting this elite form of patriotism, Lillie's diary reveals how public scripts of suffering and sacrifice entered many middle-and upper-class homes, where they were often internalized.

It is telling (and characteristic), furthermore, that the above entry—and its self-positioning—is entwined with references to 'the paper'. Indeed, as we saw in Chapter One, being well informed and capable of 'reporting' the war's major events is itself a mark of patriotic citizenship; so too is the prominence of place granted to the war on *each* page of the diary. The rare mention, or absence, of the personal, is, in turn, a symbol of the writers' acknowledgment that the concerns of the nation must take precedence. Scales' diary, on the whole, reflects this form of personal relegation and sacrifice. It is indeed a 'War Diary', a text that is, at least for Scales, *different* in form and function from that of its more mundane, pre-war counterpart. A tangible record of her and her husband's experience of, and contribution to, the war, it leaves no room for the personal, no matter how emotionally pressing; 'Since [I last wrote] we have had a great sorrow. Our darling Mother left us', writes Scales in October 1918, '[but] I will not write about it here'.[7] Whether out of self-sacrifice, or self-consciousness—for the future reader of whom she is ever-aware—she remains focused on the war, thereby reasserting her identity as patriotic woman in, and through, its pages. 'Everyone is now engaged in war work', she goes on to write in the same entry.

The counterpart to Chapter One, this chapter examines a diverse range of middle-and upper-class women's life-writing on the home front, both published and archival.[8] It considers how

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[6] 'England in Time of War', *The Times*, 14 December 1914, p. 9.
[7] Ibid., diary, 24 October 1918, p. 152.
[8] It should be noted that while The Imperial War Museum houses a vast collection of life-writing documents, those written by 'ordinary' women—those who chose not, or could not enter factories or join the Voluntary Aid Detachments—are limited. As outlined in the introduction, this speaks in part to the perceived value of their role, as compared to that of the soldier.

the private, written page functions as a site of self-creation, as women seek shape, recognition, and authentication for their multiple wartime identities—as mother, wife, volunteer, professional, and patriotic citizen. Not unlike the life-writing of civilian men, the diary and letter here illuminate the extent to which individual women are both shaped and shape themselves by the war's competing and contested public scripts surrounding patriotic womanhood. In the chapter's first sections, I will examine how home front women like Lille Scales used their diary as a site of identity creation, exploration, and preservation. The private text is here a site of potential freedom, refuge, and, at times, rebellion, however subtle. It is also a site for the expression and navigation of frustration for many women. As men's role as soldier was positioned as the highest form of sacrifice, many young women grew increasingly frustrated with their comparatively limited opportunities to contribute. 'Oh it's you that have the luck out there in the blood and muck', famously, and emblematically, writes Rose Macaulay in 'Many Sisters to Many Brothers'.[9] This desire is reflected on the diary pages of young home front women in particular. 'All girls wish to have some special work outside their own home-life', writes Mrs. Purbrook in her diary, 'even those for whom there is not the slightest need to earn'.[10] Women's identities as patriotic citizens are here threatened by the limitations of their position as 'those requiring protection' in war. The feminine, domestic identity, in other words, conflicts with that of the self-sacrificing, patriotic citizen. Knitting and rolling bandages—while widely promoted activities in the war's early months—made few feel that they were 'dedicat[ing] all that they had and all that they were to the country's service'.[11] 'Knitted hard all morning', writes Miss E. Dodsworth in January 1915, 'went to the YMCA club room to help with tea. Not much doing'; she would later serve as a volunteer nurse.[12] On the pages of their private diaries, these young

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[9] Rose Macaulay, 'Many Sisters to Many Brothers', *Poems of To-day: An Anthology* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1916), p. 24.
[10] Mrs. Purbrook, diary, no date. IWM, Documents. 15021 (06/53/1), p. 12-13.
[11] 'The Citizen's Duty', 3 May 1915, *The Times,* Emphasis added.
[12] Miss E. Dodsworth, diary, 2 January 1915, IWM, Documents. 4368 (82/12/1).

middle-class women too draw on the language of public scripts surrounding sacrifice, as they seek to shape, bolster and authenticate their identities as valuable, patriotic citizens.

Having examined how life-writing functions in the creation, and authentication, of women's various new wartime roles, the analysis then turns to the letter. More specifically, it provides a detailed analysis of how home front wives, mothers, and sweethearts used the letter's pages to express feelings of fear, longing, and grief. Life-writing here functions as a creative space where memory and fantasy entwine, as women sought to both maintain relationships with, and provide comfort to, fighting men. The chapter's final section examines how profound anxiety and grief is narrated, navigated, and, potentially, mitigated in both the diary and letter. Indeed, as we shall see, for some women, life-writing and its sub-genres—memory books and scrapbooks—allows for the continuation of their identities as mothers, and spouses, even after the death of their serving soldier. I begin, however, with an outlining of some of the public scripts offered to women on the home front. While both contested, and, at times, outright rejected, these scripts were nonetheless a significant element in what Noam Chomsky calls 'the manufacture of consent'.[13]

I. Public Scripts and the patriotic woman

'[T]his is the time when every woman in England is called upon to be brave and self-sacrificing', declared *Women's World* in September 1914.[14] From the war's outset, both official and unofficial sources of propaganda made it abundantly clear that the war would require the participation and support of every citizen, both male and female. Opening his campaign to 'Awaken' the country, Prime Minister Asquith spoke fervently at Guildhall on 4 September of 'the duty of *every* Briton in

[13] Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (London: The Bodley Head, 2008**).**
[14] 'Heart to Heart Chats', *Woman's World*, 19 September, 1914, p. 271.

[this] crisis'.[15] The form and nature of women's participation, however, was limited, in particular, in the early months, as the war's rapid change brought about a call for a return to traditional forms of both masculinity and femininity; the latter, in part, in order to counter and repress the powerful images of women's transgressive pre-war behaviour—the suffrage movement being only the most visible, and most aggressive, example of this. 'Wartime', argues Lois Bibbings, 'is often characterized by crude dichotomies and stark reversals in attitudes, as the extremes of a national emergency tend to lead to rapid shifts in and the polarization of conceptions and attitudes'.[16] Among the First World War's widely-promoted dichotomies was the Victorian ideology of 'separate spheres'. In political speeches, propaganda posters, newspaper and magazine articles, female participation in war was represented as taking place largely within the home, a home that was both idealized and feminised, along with its inhabitants, being that which the heroic soldier fights to honour and protect. 'Is Your Home Worth Fighting For?', demanded one 1915 Parliamentary Recruiting Poster.[17] When directed specifically at women, this rhetoric encouraged female policing of male behaviour; 'Women of Britain say "Go!"' declares one famous 1915 recruitment poster, 'Will You Go or Must I?', demands the woman featured on another.[18]

Positioned within this ideal home was the Patriotic Mother and/or Waiting Woman, two prominent social and behavioural scripts offered to women by both official and unofficial propaganda. Both of these women are depicted as willing to selflessly sacrifice their men to the nation's cause without hesitation or complaint. They are then encouraged to 'do their bit' by providing cheerful support and encouragement to their serving soldiers, in turn, repressing any

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[15] 'An Awakened Country', 4 September 1914, *The Times*, p. 9. Emphasis added.
[16] Lois Bibbings, 'Images of Manliness: The Portrayal of Soldiers and Contentious Objectors in the Great War', *Social and Legal Studies* 12.3 (2003). p. 337
[17] 'Is Your Home Worth Fighting For?', 1915, Parliamentary Recruiting Committee, Poster No. 661, IWM, PST 13623; 'For the Glory of Ireland', 1914, IWM, Department of Photographs, no. Q80367.
[18] E.P. Kealey, 'Women of Britain say "GO!"', 1915, Parliamentary Recruiting Committee Poster No. 75, IWM, Art. PST 2763.

personal struggle in order to protect their morale. 'This letter is just to cheer you up, if you need cheering up' writes Winifred Newman to her soldier sweetheart on 6 May 1915.[19] By sending your sons to war 'with a faith that only a mother can instil […] you are as much fighting as are your soldier and sailor sons', reassures the editorial of *Mother and Home*.[20] This rhetoric, equating maternal self-sacrifice with military duty, also worked simultaneously to silence feelings of dissent. As argued by Carol Acton, 'individuals were […] encouraged to uphold the dominant discourse of keeping cheerful [in their letters] so as not to undermine the morale of the [soldier] recipient'.[21] A mother and/or wife who tried to dissuade her son or husband from enlisting was deemed unpatriotic. 'Dear Lassie', 'how wrongly you are behaving', admonishes one editor in her response to a letter received from a woman 'torn to pieces with grief and sadness' at the thought of her sweetheart's enlistment. 'Instead of imploring your sweetheart to shirk his duty, you should have done your best to urge him to fulfil [it] in the spirit of a true British soldier […]. [We must] cheer our dear ones—husbands, sweethearts, fathers, and brothers—and send them off to their calling with brave, noble hearts'.[22] One facet of publically endorsed womanhood—that of nurturer, care giver, and life-giver—is thereby brought into conflict with one of the war's primary behavioural scripts for home front women, that of moral and self-sacrificing patriot, for whom (and whose body) the nation's men fight to honour and protect. While responsible for providing nurturance and care to her son and husband, she must now cheerfully send them to fight, and, possibly to die. Women's internalization of this rhetoric—though to varying degrees—is clear on the pages of their letters and diaries. '[O]h, Cyril, when I write and think I am permitted to write you as I do, it almost takes my breath away. You

[19] Winifred Newman, letter 6 May 1915, included within documents of C.T. Newman, Imperial War Museum, Documents. 12494 (03/5/1).
[20] 'To the Mothers of Britain', *Mother and Home*, 5 September 1914, p. 425.
[21] Carol Acton, *Grief in Wartime* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan), p. 10.
[22] 'Heart to Heart Chats', *Women's World*, 19 September 1914, p. 271.

who are so high, so noble, so great so good', writes one woman. '[B]ut I made up my mind to buck up as I promised you darling, and so I help you on your weary way', writes another.[23]

As the war's increasing demands for participation required the 'recruitment' of women in wartime roles well outside of the home—on the front (nurses) and in the factories (munitions), for example—propaganda attempted to envelop these potentially transgressive roles within the same traditional rhetoric. The patriotic nurse, and, in particular, the generally younger VAD, was depicted as the fighting soldier's highly romanticized female equivalent. Public scripts depicted her in starch white dress and flowing veil, gliding along the battlefield, administering to wounded men. Her script thus offered the highly-glamorized role of self-sacrificing, demure, and angelic healer, one who carried women's 'natural' characteristics of nurturance, care, and life-giving to the battle front. As asserted by Carol Acton, such scripts 'stress[ing] care and concern […] conveyed no sense of the real nature of work'.[24] The munitionette's role was too frequently tied to traditionally middle-class, feminine forms. Hall Caine's 1917 book, *Our Girls: Their Work for the War*, provides an example. After 'reporting' on his tour of London's Woolwich arsenal, he writes:

> a stronger impulse than the desire for large earning must be operating with many to enable them to defy so much discomfort. This is not the first time that women have made munitions of war. For every war that has yet been waged women have supplied the first and greatest of all munitions—men […] Therefore, consciously or unconsciously, the daughters of Britain may be answering some mysterious call of their sex in working all day and all night in the munition factories.[25]

Seeking to assuage middle-class concerns relating to both class and gender, Caine here ties the potentially transgressive female munitions worker to images of domestic maternal womanhood. As argued by Debra Rae Cohen '[A]ppeals for women to serve the state in factories or on the land had to be not only balanced against the prevailing idea that women's primary war-work was reproduction

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[23] Winifred Blackburn, letter, IWM, Documents. 12494 (03/5/1); Edith Bennett, letter, 19 August 1917, IWM, Documents. 3695 (96/3/1).
[24] Carol Acton, *Grief in Wartime*, p. 136.
[25] Hall Caine, *Our Girls: Their Work for the War* (London: Hutchinson, 1916), p. 34.

rather than production, but also justified in terms of traditional "feminine" values'.[26] It should be noted that these traditional representations were frequently challenged. In her 'Recollections of the Great War', Miss O.M. Taylor, a munitions worker and eventual WAAC member, sardonically comments on a lecture she and her fellow WAAC's were given to 'warn girls' of the supposedly 'awful disease[s] [that] could be caught through a kiss'.[27] However, whether complied with or refuted, these prominent public scripts, as we shall see, are woven within women's private representations of their wartime identities. I will turn now to an examination of the diaries and letters of middle-and upper-class women on the home front, highlighting, first, how public scripts of self-sacrifice are both performed and navigated on the private written page, as women seek to both bolster and preserve their identities as valuable patriotic citizens.

II. The diary and the creation, and navigation, of the wartime self.

'You may be sure I will see the soldiers do not get things […] half made', proudly writes the mother of combatant A.W. Page in a letter sent to him on the front.[28] Wanting an active role in the war, and to contribute financially to her family, Mrs. Page had taken a position at a munitions factory examining haversacks. This desire for an active role in the war, and thereby to contribute not only to the protection and comfort of her soldier son but also to the nation's victory, is one commonly expressed in women's writing on the home front. In their diaries women often repeatedly catalogue their contributions, such lists perhaps serving to reassure both themselves—and the imagined future reader—that they were indeed 'dedicat[ing] all that they had' to the war effort.[29] 'Knitted most of the morning […]. Collected for Belgians before lunch, the usual round […]. Had a very busy time […]. I

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[26] Debra Rae Cohen, *Remapping the Home Front: Locating Citizenship in British Women's Great War Fiction* (Boston: Northeastern University P, 2002), p. 4.
[27] O.M. Taylor, diary/memoir, IWM, Documents. 4181 (83/17/1), p. 22.
[28] A.W. Page, letter, IWM, Documents. 7983 (98/28/1).
[29] 'The Citizens Duty', 3 May 1915, *The Times*.

sold tickets & cigarettes & looked after the library list', writes E Dodsworth in her diary.[30] This compiling of wartime 'duties' is often granted more elaborate presentation in the diaries of older, middle-and-upper-class women. The scrapbook-style diary of Ethel Bilbrough provides an example.

Her diary, in its careful construction and authoritative voice, seeks to both create and preserve a subject that is fully engaged in, and vital to, the war effort, both privately and publically. Her diary includes a diverse collection of corresponding period documents, such as letters, photographs, and newspaper clippings. In their cumulative effect, these small relics, preciously preserved, serve as confirmation for the diarist's carefully constructed wartime identity as a committed and conscientious contributor to the war effort. Indeed, running throughout her diary is an undercurrent of insistence. Her fervent desire is to present herself, in these 'epoch-making times', as playing a significant role in the war.[31] She is an avid fundraiser, helping her husband to raise over £12,000 for blinded soldiers, a volunteer, knitting garments for British snipers, an occasional columnist, having published articles on wartime animal welfare, and a keenly informed citizen and reporter, keeping track of (and meticulously documenting) the war's events on both home and battlefront.[32] In describing each of these 'duties', Bilbrough's tone is confident and self-assured. She is, furthermore, offended by her government's official classification of her position solely as a housewife—as is printed on her National Registration Card. In a lengthy diary entry, dated 15 October 1915, she writes:

> For some reason best known to those in authority, there has been an immense universal Registration Act passed throughout the country and every man and woman has had to give their names, ages, and occupations […]. Anyhow as it's got something to do with the war I shall stick my card in here as it's my war diary; besides I've no use for the silly thing, and why do they put "household duties" as my principal occupation in life, when they certainly constitute the least?'.[33]

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[30] E. Dodsworth, diary, 16 January 1915, IWM, Documents. 4368 (82/12/1).
[31] Ethel Bilbrough, diary, 15 July 1915, *My War Diary, 1914-1918* (London: Ebury Press, 2014), p. 3.
[32] Ibid., 1 May 1916; 4 August 1918; 15 July 1915, pp. 145, 183, 216.
[33] Ibid., 15 October 1915, pp. 177-178.

The government's simple, domestic classification of her role troubles the wartime identity she so ardently seeks to create and preserve. Bilbrough's highly self-conscious text, in short, similar to that of Lillie Scales, provides a venue for the shaping and performance of her wartime identity. Ever conscious of the eye of her imagined future reader, Bilbrough simultaneously seeks validation for this identity as informed, committed, and valuable patriotic woman.

Frequently woven throughout such diaries are the public scripts surrounding patriotic sacrifice. In a context where the soldier's struggle—amid profoundly difficult, uncomfortable, and dangerous surroundings—was constantly discussed and exalted, many home front women, whether consciously or not, sought to highlight the difficulty and struggle behind their contributions. This is present, as we have seen, in the diary of Lillie Scales, whose distinctly domestic sacrifices are framed as 'a great trial'.[34] In her diary/memoir, Miss Joan Williams, a middle-class munitions worker, writes of feeling 'a zest in the hardships, such as they were', finding 'more romance [in] 'war work' when you weren't made too comfortable'.[35] In her meticulous and highly detailed diary, G. M. West similarly writes, 'I've got to do my bit whether I enjoy it or not, and after all, what are my little discomforts compared to what our men have been through, but it is dull here.'[36] The private diary, in these moments, is a performative space, a site for the bolstering of the home front woman's identity as self-sacrificing patriot. For West, it is also a potential tool for self-improvement, the scripts for which have been readily provided by prominent patriotic discourse, 'I've got to do my bit', she writes.[37]

For those young women who had rushed to volunteer for the war's most glamorized role—that of the volunteer nurse—the diary, at least in the war's early months, served as a site for the

[34] Scales, diary, August 1916, pp. 23-24.
[35] Miss Joan Williams, diary/memoir, IWM, Documents. 30096, p. 25.
[36] Miss G. M. West, diary, 6 July 1915, IWM, Documents. 7142 (77/156/1).
[37] Ibid.

venting of private frustrations. Her performance in the role of heroine was delayed, as home front hospitals needed to be set-up and organized before receiving its wounded heroes. Indeed, wounded and convalescent men had not yet begun returning from the front. In the war's early months, the diary of VAD nurse E. Dodsworth alternates between documentation of her multiple volunteer roles—as knitter, fundraiser, and canteen worker—and confession, as she vents her keen desire and frustration at having to wait to begin her more valued role as nurse. 'We went out fairly early up to the V.A.D. Hospital where we washed electric light globes etc, & got into an awful mess. It is a dirty depressing spot', she writes flatly in early January 1915.[38] 'I had to go to the V.A.D. Hospital this morning at 11. I go on duty today for a month, but of course there are no patients! had to fill bottles etc. Very dull', she later candidly writes on 1 February.[39] Having internalized the war's idealized depictions, she does not consider what is required for 'more exciting' and more romantic nursing work—the damaged and suffering male body. Indeed, as we have seen, the heroic soldier's public scripts obscured such realities. The diary here is a kind of confidant, a place where she can privately express such desires and frustrations.

On 25 February, she receives the notification for which she's been anxiously waiting: 'Tonight at last we have patients in the V.A.D. Hospital & I got my orders for duty tomorrow. 2-5. So thrilled'.[40] The entries that follow this one make abundantly clear her keen desire to perform her side of the idealized ideological tableau—that of ministering angel to the nation's wounded heroes. Indeed, her desire for direct contact is palpable. After her first shift, she writes, 'an eventful day for me, my first chance to help the wounded. It didn't amount to very much, but it was something […]. All we did was to get their tea ready, cut bread & butter, boiled eggs etc. Took their trays round. So

[38] Miss E Dodsworth, diary, 8 January 1915, IWM, Documents. 4368 (82/12/1).
[39] Ibid, 1 February 1915.
[40] Ibid., 25 February 1915.

cheery & polite, wanted to talk to them so badly but I darn't stop.'[41] The diary here continues to serve as a kind of companion during her first months of training. Her desire to successfully perform the idealized role of nurse remains clear, as any perceived personal failures on the hospital's 'stage' brings immense shame. '[Two surgical cases] were being dressed by the doctor today & I had to hold the men's arms […]. I nearly fainted, so ashamed of myself.'[42] Her identity as heroine nurse having been threatened, the diary entries that follow meticulously document every 'success', no matter how small; 'Took all my lads temperatures today', she proudly writes the next day.[43] Dodsworth's diary, similar to the life-writing of Scales, Bilbrough, Page, and West, here functions as a private space for the creation, performance, and navigation of women's new wartime identities, identities that were both shaped in, and by, prominent public scripts of patriotic sacrifice.

I will turn now, from the functions of the diary and scrapbook to those of the letter. More specifically, I will turn to an examination of the letter's functions for the home front 'waiting woman'. Whether written by a mother, wife, or sweetheart, these pages reveal the multiple ways in which public scripts were internalized, negotiated, and, at times, eschewed—both consciously and not—by the women who were responsible for 'keeping the home fires burning'.

III. The navigation of absence—the letter and maintaining connection to both fighting soldiers and conflicting 'selves'

In the *Secret Battle*, Michael Roper rightly highlights the letter's significance to the fighting soldier; its contents, offering comfort and support, along with the touch and taste of home, undoubtedly contributed, he argues, to men's mental and emotional survival.[44] These letters, however, were also

[41] Ibid., 26 February 1915.
[42] Ibid., 16 April 1915.
[43] Ibid., 17 April 1915.
[44] Michael Roper, *The Secret Battle: Emotional Survival in the Great War* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2009).

vital to the sender. Their pages offered home front women—be they wives, mothers, sisters, or sweethearts—a venue for the navigation of absence. They provided a private space through which some sense of connection, of intimacy (even touch) could be maintained. Indeed, the freedom granted by the letter's malleable form allowed for the conjuring of male presence. In providing the home front woman with a venue for maintaining such intimate connections, the letter simultaneously served as a site for the maintenance and repair of their identities as spouses, mothers, and patriotic citizens, identities whose private representation both draws on and refutes public scripts surrounding silent and self-sacrificial images of patriotic womanhood.[45]

The letter's generic demand for the self-positioning of its writer becomes particularly vital in war in its allowing of some semblance of continued shared experience. While the frontline soldier often positions the home front reader within his chaotic surroundings—'right now, I am writing by candlelight in the dugout'—the home front woman frequently positions her husband briefly within a moment of peaceful, and mundane, domestic calm. 'I've just had to stop this letter', writes Edith Bennett to her combatant husband, 'to give the lady a feed & now she's asleep'.[46] 'Mrs. T & I have been out in the garden', writes Emily Chitticks in March 1917, 'we have been digging & sowing onion & leeks'.[47] '[The baby] is screaming now in her bath…rather than being dressed', writes another new mother, Cicely Marriott.[48] This reciprocal positioning, in space and time, marks a point of imagined connection. Offering the sights and sounds of their present surroundings, furthermore,

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[45] It should be noted that while this chapter focuses primarily on the representations of middle and upper-class heterosexual relationships and identities, the war's changing demands and expectations for women at home also offered professional identities to women well outside the home—as ambulance drivers, land girls, and munitions workers, for example. Scholars such as Laura Doan have illuminated the sense of freedom and liberation frequently offered to lesbian identities in war. 'Miss Ogilvy Finds Herself: The queer navigational systems of Radclyffe Hall', *English Language Notes* 45.2. (2007). *Sapphic Modernities: Sexuality, Women and National Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).
[46] Bennett, 1 December 1915.
[47] Emily Chitticks, letter, 29 March 1917, IWM, Documents. 2554. in Mandy Kirkby, *Love Letters of the Great War* (Basingstoke and Oxford: Macmillan, 2014), pp. 155-156.
[48] Cicely Marriott, letter, 6 August 1915, Liddle Collection, Private Papers (GSI052), cited in *Love Letters of the Great War*, p. 124.

illuminates an unconscious attempt to bridge the letter's inherent temporal gap. Such descriptions create a momentary illusion of shared experience. 'Mum has taken [the baby] into the garden so I can write these few lines', writes Bennett.[49]

At other moments, the present, with its anxieties and uncertainties, is relegated, and a comparatively idyllic future is imagined and constructed. Here, time is not compressed, but sped up, as home front writers describe a future domestic bliss. Writing in August 1917, after only a few months of separation from her Gunner Husband, Edith Bennett conjures the family reunited:

> What an experience for you dearest & what a lot you will have to tell dear Ruby & I when you return to us again, & how, many an evening we shall sit in the dear firelight listening to all your travels. What a time that will be dear, one can hardly realise it, if only it was for some other purpose, one could be so very much happier, but there dearest that's the way of this wicked war, so I must buck up for your dear sake, & and we will make up for all this when you come back to us which I pray please God will not be much longer now as we are all fed up with it.
>
> So dearest don't despair & think you will be forgotten, not while I live. Please God he will give us all health & strength, especially the old people, to give you a [hero's] welcome on your return & with flags flying we will just show them all how much our love & devotion was secure, Oh dear what a day it will be eh.[50]

Bennett here uses the letter to create a scene of future domestic bliss, complete with 'dear firelight'. In this imagined perfect moment, her husband's stories of war, frightening and violent in reality, become the tales of a returned traveller. Just as any domestic strife—financial, marital, parental—is omitted, so too are the war's realities, if not the war entirely. The letter thus locates both writer and reader in a fleeting world of peace, quiet, and warmth. In a letter written on the first day of the Battle of the Somme, Ethel Gawthorp similarly conjures a simple, but nonetheless ideal, future with her combatant fiancé. While briefly chastising herself for her persistent focus on this idealized post-war period, she appears unable to do otherwise—the present holding too many dangers for her

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[49] Bennett, 1 December 1916.
[50] Ibid., 11 August 1917.

husband, as well as uncertainties for herself. The letter is thus here a tool for distraction and avoidance; it is also a mechanism for control, however illusory:

> Dearest Walter […],
>
> Only to think of having you next to me at Chapel, well laddie I'm sure of this, that I shall worship better. […] Oh what a grand reunion we shall have at the S. School when you come home. My word the school will look full & how we shall talk. I wish someone had a camera & could just snap us. You would see hand-shaking & heads nodding, getting hold of your arm if your hands were full. I'm thinking that I shall begrudge anyone taking possession of you. But then you'll be able to save a lot of room for your girlie by your side, won't you, love? Oh won't it be grand when we meet again […]. You are never out of my thoughts night & day. There! I must stop talking about the future. I sometimes wonder what we shall do when you come back again dear. Last week Bert Lee was saying oh when Walter comes back we shall never see you, or perhaps I shall come in & you'll say, well, I can go for a walk but I must be back at 7.30 or 8 because Walter is coming. I said, Oh, we'll wait and see, he might want to drill one or two nights per week & then I laughed.
>
> Won't it be grand when you are walking up the road & then we walk over Sugar Well Hill & down that lane where we met […].[51]

In these letters, Bennett and Gawthorp are equal participants in the idealization of home. As will be discussed in Chapter Three, soldier's letters frequently imagine, in great detail, a highly-romanticized home to which they long to return, a home void of not only danger, but strife of any kind. The years of spousal and parental separation are imagined to have no negative impact on personal relationships. Indeed, for Gawthorp, there will not only be a tranquil and triumphant return to Sunday School—complete with crowding admirers and hardy handshakes—but also a rejuvenation of her faith and identity as a Christian. The home, which many men had enlisted to protect, is suspended in time, as are its routines and quotidian commitments. So too are the identities of the waiting women within them. In such letters, home front women depict themselves as cheerful, pious, nurturing, and consoling, characteristics that overlap with prominent public scripts. They are depicted, in other words, as unchanged by grief and anxiety, as well as by the experience of taking on the additional burdens and responsibilities that the war demanded of them—whether relating to

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[51] Ethel Gawthorp, letter, 1 July 1916, Liddle Collection, Private Papers (GSI447), cited in cited in Mandy Kirkby, ed., *Love Letters of the Great War*, p. 95.

volunteer work, household management, and/or sole parenting. '[Ruby] is always talking about what she's going to do when her dear daddy comes home,' assures Edith Bennett on 5 November 1917, 'so dear you mustn't think or worry that she's forgotten you'.[52]

This omission, or avoidance, of any discussion of female struggle was encouraged by some fighting men. Writing to his wife in March 1917, Gunner William Munton concludes a particularly anxious letter—in which he repeatedly assures his wife of his steadfast fidelity—with the following directives:

> Give my love to all at home, Lily & Lizzie & the children. Tell Lily to buck up & not to worry—try & keep cheerful & brave yourself because you know, when I do come home I don't want to find my wife looking aged with worry, I want to find you just as nice and pretty as I left you. God Bless You My Darling & keep you in all things.
>
> With the Best of all Best Love
> Your affectionet Husband Will
>
> XXXXXXXXXX
> XXXXXXXXXX[53]

Arthur Harrington similarly writes of his desire for an unchanged home:

> The style and tone of your letters assure me that you are keeping well and bright, and that is the condition I desire above all others that you should always find yourself in, so that I may find the same happy girl awaiting me on my return as I left behind.[54]

Read in the context of war's extreme violence, profound discomforts, and prolonged separations, it is not difficult to imagine why men sought comfort and reassurance through imagining idyllic homes and domestic bliss. In these instances, the letter provides a venue to both soldier and home front woman for the creation of an unchanging, domestic utopia. The written page here thus provides a mechanism for protection and a tool for distraction. In conjuring scenes of domestic unity and beauty, women provided vital emotional support to frightened, frequently disillusioned, and

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[52] Bennett, 5 November 1917.
[53] Gunner William Munton, letter, 30 March 1917, *Love Letters of the Great War*, ed. by Mandy Kirkby (London: Macmillan, 2014), pp. 158-161.
[54] Arthur Harrington, letter in *Wives and Sweethearts: Love Letters Sent During Wartime*, ed. by A. Massie and F. Parton (London: Simon and Schuster, 2014), p. 26.

exhausted men. This positions them in the role of protector, a potentially powerful and transgressive position that is, rather, depicted in traditionally feminine terms by public discourses; '[U]plift him and send him away with a heart full of hope', is among the most prominent, publically endorsed, directives of patriotic womanhood.[55] Indeed, as argued by Carol Acton in her study *Grief in Wartime*, the public discourses offered to anxious, frustrated, and bereaved wartime women 'limited the range of feeling and expression to emotions and behaviour that supported the war effort, silencing grief narratives that resisted those sanctioned by pro-war voices'.[56] The internalization of these discourses can be glimpsed in Ethel Gawthorp's above letter to her combatant husband. Near its close, she gestures toward her uncertainty—and possible anxiety—regarding his return from war and how it might impact her commitment to her social and volunteer activities; 'I sometimes wonder what we shall do when you come back again dear. Last week Bert Lee was saying oh when Walter comes back we shall never see you'.[57] However, before carrying this thought further, she promptly returns to depicting scenes of her husband's idyllic return, 'Won't it be grand when you are walking up the road & then we walk over Sugar Well Hill & down that lane where we met […]'.[58] As this subtle moment of self-censorship makes clear, the practiced omission or downplaying of female fear and frustration could result in the silencing or stifling of grief. This silencing, as we have seen, was undoubtedly what was socially prescribed. The emotional needs of the fighting soldier must take precedence. Indeed, the home front women's silent anguish, as she encourages, cheers, passively waits, or mourns, is framed as part a fundamental part of her duty and her sacrifice.

[55] 'Heart to Heart Chats', *Woman's World*, 19 September, 1914, p. 271.
[56] Carol Acton, *Grief in Wartime* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan), p. 23.
[57] Ethel Gawthorp, letter, 1 July 1916, p. 95.
[58] Ibid., p. 95.

The tensions of this publically endorsed silencing are played out on the letter's pages. Indeed, self-admonishing frequently follows any confession of struggle. Three days after her husband's departure for training, Edith Bennett writes:

> Well darling it seems like 3 months instead of days since I saw your dear old face, my heart is still full, especially when Ruby says Oh dear dad dad & kisses your photo & bedtime Monday night I felt it terribly all alone. Well dearest I must not worry you about myself but was pleased to get the letter so cheerful this morning.[59]

The following year, the tension between her desire to shield and her desire to tell threatens to overwhelm. The letter's pages reveal her internal battle:

> Well dear your long looked for letter did cheer me up, but now it seems such an age since that was written & one wonders whether you are sill O.K. as so much may happen in the mean while[.] I do long for another line & what I would give for the sight of your dear face I could'nt express if only it would soon end, to get you home again, & each time I see Charlie it makes me long & long still more[.] I have just wished him good night as he goes off early in the morning & still no signs of him going any further than Colchester what a lucky girl Lal is, if I were only like her I should be happier but my luck seems to be right out somehow, but there I must try and keep my promise I gave you dear, but at times when one sits alone & thinks you can't help feeling depressed & when I look up at your Photo dear it makes my heart feel fit to burst but I really must buck up [for] you and dear Ruby's sake.[60]

Bennett here struggles amid the conflicting desires and expectations of her multiple wartime roles. As self-sacrificing 'waiting woman', she is also a protector and bolsterer of her combatant husband's mental and emotional state. She wants to reassure and encourage him, a want that while unquestionably genuine, was also socially prescribed. Both this patriotic 'duty' and genuine wifely desire, however, conflict with her other, perhaps more basic needs, as a woman, and as a human, one who desires *self*-protection, reassurance, and companionship. I will turn now to an examination of the letter's functions in relation to longing, intimacy, 'touch', and 'sex'. Indeed, while the mutual construction of the ideal, unchanging home, undoubtedly provided some sense of comfort and

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[59] Bennett, 6 September 1916.
[60] Ibid., 27 September 1917.

consolidation, the war's prolonged separations demanded the imagining and performance of more direct, intimate contact.

i. Intimacy, touch, and sex: the letter

The letter was a primary means through which men and women maintained bonds of not only communication, but intimacy, both emotional and physical. As a tangible, material object which bears signs of the sender, the letter can function as a kind of 'stand in' for its writer. Indeed, as argued by Liz Stanley in 'The Epistolarium: On Theorizing Letters and Correspondences', the letter can create a 'simulacrum of presence'.[61] The sender's handwriting, characteristic diction, and folding of the paper, for example, can combine in conjuring a sense of physical presence. In war, amid its prolonged separations, its dangers, and its grief, this potential conjuring made the letter a vital tool in the continuation and maintenance of relationships between those on the front and those at home. 'I sleep with [your letter] under my pillow', confesses one home front woman in a letter to her sweetheart.[62] It was also, simultaneously, a venue for the continuation of women's roles and identities as wives and lovers. Indeed, women's letters to the front frequently contain expressions of longing and desire. Writing in October 1918, home front nurse, Helen Muriel Harpin writes an excited letter to her soldier sweetheart, 2nd Lieutenant Charles L. Overton (Neville), who has been briefly sent back to England on convalescent leave. Before beginning her night shift, she writes the following letter:

> Neville my darling,
>
> I am getting more and more excited at the thought of seeing you on Tuesday. What are we going to do with Mother? We must lose her sometimes! She wants to go and see the Aldriches in Wimbledon one day and another day she is going to some people who live in Kensington, but she won't want to be out late in the evening on her wild lone (unfortunately). What shall we do? I keep thinking of taxis for one thing. One can have lots of kisses in a taxi when needs must! Aren't I getting depraved? But I'm longing so much for a good time and I do love your kisses. I don't think I could ever tire of them, and we can't go a whole 3 days without any, can we? On the other hand we can't leave Mother stranded the whole time and go to theatres and leave her behind always. I foresee some

[61] Liz Stanley, 'The Epistolarium: On Theorizing Letters and Correspondences', *Auto/Biography* 12 (2004), p. 209.
[62] Winifred Blackburn, letter, 9 May 1915, IWM, Documents. 12494 (03/5/1).

> complications. I suppose it will have to be matinees if we go to theatres. How often can you have a pass till 10 pm? I don't care what we do so long as we're together, but I do mean to enjoy every bit just as much as possible. I <u>am</u> longing to see you, dear--please don't be any thinner.
>
> Night duty now, so goodnight my very own Boy. Be good till I come!
>
> Heaps and heaps of love,
>
> Always your
>
> Muriel[63]

For women whose spouses or sweethearts were not granted leave, the letter's function, at times, became more complex and often more significant. The consistently lengthy and highly detailed letters of C.T Newman and Winifred Blackburn provide an example. A religious and idealistic couple—who would later be married during the war—Newman and Blackburn exchanged near-daily letters. Winifred's (Winnie) correspondence provides a clear example of how some public scripts could be taken on, while others eschewed. While constantly praising her sweetheart using the heightened language of propaganda—calling him 'brave', 'noble', 'great', heroic'—Winifred rarely represses her personal struggles with his absence. Her letters, furthermore, are often very clear in their longing. On 6 May 1915, she writes:

> Cyril, you are too good to me dear—I do not know what I should do without your letters—they do cheer and comfort me. […] Oh why, cannot I go and fight for you, that you might come home—I want to so much—dear Cyril, believe me, I mean it. I would do anything for you, it were only possible, they would not miss me as you are missed. I pray this war may very soon be over. I cannot, really cannot be without you much longer, how can I wait! My very own dear Cyril you must be ashamed of me altogether—I am so impatient—my whole heart cries out for you—to be by your side. […]
>
> Good-bye my precious, dearest boy,
> With deepest love, and—a long farewell kiss
> From your broken-hearted little girl,
>
> Winnie

[63] Helen Muriel Harpin, letter, 3 October 1918, *Love Letters of the Great War* (Basingstoke and Oxford: Macmillan, 2014), pp. 122-123.

> Ps. Thank you so much for photograph; it is not good, but it is your dear self—that is enough. Dearest Cyril, I hardly like to send this letter, destroy it when read. Forgive everything. Do not think I worry I know all is well.
>
> Love Winnie[64]

The letter here functions as a venue for the unburdening, and release, of both fear and longing. Indeed, expressions of the latter compound, making palpable the intensity of her desire; 'I want to so much', 'I would do anything', 'I cannot, really cannot', she fervently writes. So strong is her want of his presence, that she would, paradoxically, change places with him, perhaps so as to protect the body she so longs to touch. Having unburdened her feelings, it is only at the close—perhaps as she prepares to seal the letter—that she betrays a sense of self-doubt, of self-consciousness: 'I hardly like to send this letter, destroy it when read'. It appears that her identity as sweetheart, and as future lover, conflicts here with her socially prescribed role as stoic and self-sacrificing waiting women, the former having perhaps found some sense of relief through the letter's purge. In any case, she ends with a vague phrase that is reflective of public scripts—'Do not think I worry I know all is well'.

While Winifred's letter, though full of longing, is subtle in its language concerning physical intimacy, others are more overt. Amy Hadley's 1918 letter to Private John Clifton (Jack) provides a clear, if atypical, example. She writes:

> Jack --my own-- my only love -- how I look for your next letter -- How much longer shall I have to wait? Dearheart, I want you -- My life -- Jack -- how changed it is when you are by my side -- what different air I seem to breathe into my lungs--! Jack -- Jack -- Oh! Hasten the day -- the moment when I shall be by his side again -- Jack -- my Jack -- my same, same heartmate -- Goodnight my love -- God bless you my own. Tuesday Jickie Jock -- my own & how today? How you would have smiled if you could have met me up the road today--Yes! You would then --To have seen my pushing David in his pram to Brayfield all on my own -- Jack, if only -- but then how can I say, how can I express all that is in my heart --? Does my Jack know--? My love, my own, at such moments, Jack, when my love has looked, has seen into the very depths of my soul -- My Jack -- My, 'Our' sacred love -- when my very soul has been revealed to him -- Jack -- you know -- How it grows & grows -- My heart -- Surely it will burst -- Jack -- Jack -- I want you -- Oh! Let me feel you crushing my very life into yours -- Jack -- Jack -- I live for you -- always, always my own.[65]

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[64] Winifred Blackburn, letter, 6 May 1915.
[65] Amy Handley, letter, no date, in *Love Letters of the Great War*, p. 82.

In its hastily written, fractured style, and its compounding expressions of longing and desire, the letter here serves as a substitute for physical intimacy. While never definitively, or overtly, speaking of sex—whether due to an awareness of the potential eye of the censor, or to socially prescribed conventions of demure femininity—the letter's progression towards its final thinly veiled illusion is clear: 'I want you—Oh! Let me feel you crushing my very life into yours.' In committing her desire to the written page, she perhaps mitigates its intensity. In any case, the letter's pages here offer the home front woman venue as wife and lover. Indeed, the letter builds to the final moment of intimate contact. The word 'feel', evoking the tactile, marks a climactic contrast to the compounding, possessive auditory words that come before it—'Jack—Jack—Oh!'. 'Jack' is repeated thirteen times, while possessive phrases like 'my own', 'my love', and 'my only' appear fourteen times. I will turn now to an examination of the letter's functions in relation to the home front woman's experience of profound anxiety and grief. Here the limitations of public scripts surrounding female sacrifice, stoicism, and bereavement, become clear. Indeed, in the private writing of the wife, mother, aunt, and sweetheart, patriotic rhetoric is both reasserted and eschewed.

iii: 'The Great Sacrifice': life-writing and the navigation of female identity in the face of loss.

In the course of my archival research at the Imperial War Museum, I found few diaries by home front women whose pages included entries on the loss of a son, brother, or husband. Putting aside the collection's comparably limited documents relating to home front women's experience, perhaps grief, like trauma, is incommunicable, at least in its immediate aftermath. In closing this chapter, I will turn to an examination of how a retrospective, sub-genre of life-writing—the memory book—functions in providing a site for the private navigation of grief. Such texts also, in turn, allowed for

the continuance of women's wartime roles and identities, even after a death. For some of those women who had received the war's most dreaded letter—the official notice of death—it was difficult to cease the comforting, and potentially self-sustaining, ritual of correspondence. This was the case for Phyllis Iliff, only seventeen when she was told her sweetheart, Lieutenant Philip Pemble (nineteen), had been killed. Months after his death, she continues her 'correspondence', creating a 'memorial book' in which she writes letters and poetry to him posthumously. On the 2 February 1919, she writes,

> My own dearest darling Phil,
>
> And so after all this is the end, you were so certain of coming back & I who was so certain of it too, have to own ourselves completely baffled. On that beautiful Saturday morning your life went out "into the ether"—and you left me here! From higher than the highest hill you come spinning down. Your body, which should have belonged to me, must have made a big hole in the ground. And I, who could have made life beautiful for you even though you would have been crippled, or disfigured or blind, may not touch, or hear, or see you anymore. My useless tears are falling. Last night in the darkness I lay & realized what it means to be alone. No one will ever understand me as you did. People try, but it always ends in "blessed if I can make you out, kid!" or "hang it, Phyl, I can't understand you in the least". [...]
>
> It has been snowing here for the last day or so & on the other afternoon I climbed right up to the top of the house and looked out over a white, white, world, but instead of seeing all the roofs covered in snow I saw just one little grave far away in a French cemetery with a plain wooden cross at the head & your dear name inscribed thereon. [...].
>
> I really must leave off now, darling, as it is nearly tea time. If I ever get married I shall burn this book, your dear letters & your still dearer photos on the eve of my wedding day & go forth on my new life with only your glorious memory to help.
>
> All my love, dear one,
>
> Phyl[66]

The posthumous letter is here a site for the navigation of identity in the face of grief, sorrow, and loss. Neither able to relinquish the role of sweetheart, nor to be recognized as a bereaved woman, she turns to the written page, continuing her correspondence with her Lieutenant, whom she can

[66] Phyllis Iliff, letter/memory book, 2 February 1919, in *Love Letters of the Great War*, p. 182.

reimagine as the ideal confidant, the only one who will 'ever understand [her]'. The letter is thus also used as a site of imaginative construction, fantasy, and memory. The young Iliff conjures a conversation with the imagined Pemble, the letter's dialogistic form inviting her to 'speak' to him, the very thing she desires most. There is undoubtedly a sense of relief, of closure, in being able to communicate a final goodbye: 'All my love, dear one'.

The blank page also offers what official correspondence would not—a depiction of his death, and of the final condition of his body. Public and official discourse, obscuring the realities of death in war, provided little language on which she could draw. As such, only the most basic, material reality of mortality can be imagined by the seventeen-year-old correspondent: 'your body, which should have belonged to me, must have made a big hole in the ground'. In providing space for the private divestment of such troubling questions and images, however vague, the blank page is here a tool for cathartic divestment. She can find release, in some sense, from her burden of grief through converting it to the tangible and destructible page; 'If ever I get married I shall burn this book', she writes.

The Imperial War Museum houses many additional examples of such memory books, or memorial scrapbooks, compiled both during and after the war, most frequently by women. Documents made both to honor and through which to grieve sons, husbands, and brothers, these texts present sub-genres of life-writing. As tools in the navigation of grief and mourning, they are also, in turn, sites for the construction of women's roles as mothers, wives, and sweethearts, as well as patriotic citizens. Indeed, the careful selection and compilation of documents and newspaper articles—which reassert the meaning and value of the son, husband, or brother's role as soldier—is also an act of continued care, nurturance, and protection. The delicate and meticulous care taken in the creation of these books, exemplified in their intricate cutting and pasting, careful chronological arrangement and placement, photograph and letter inclusions, make clear that this is a labour of

love, of care, and of memorialization. In so ensuring that *their* soldier's experience is both preserved and dignified—and thus reclaimed from the war's indignities, anonymity, and mass death—the home front woman, is permitted, in some small way, to maintain connection to her roles as mother, as nurturer, as emotional safe-guarder, and protector. Finally, the compilation is also a mechanism for regaining some sense of control. As in more traditional life-writing forms, the bereaved home front woman can, through the compilation of the memory book, create a coherent 'story' of war service—through words, images, and tangible artifacts. This appearance of coherence, and the reassertion of meaning it permits and encourages, perhaps functioned in mitigating what Joy Damousi calls, the 'havoc grief unleashes'.[67]

[67] Joy Damousi, *The Labour of Loss: Mourning, Memory and Wartime Bereavement in Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999), p. 9.

CHAPTER THREE

'FOR THE TIME BEING THEY WERE NEITHER HUNTER'S NOR HUNTED': COMBATANT LIFE-WRITING AND THE REPEATED REPRISAL AND REPAIR OF THE SOLDIER'S DOMESTIC IDENTITIES[1]

On 4 December 1915, Captain Charlie May leads D Company back from the line. '[T]hey have had rather a tough time from the rain and trench mortars'.[2] Mud-laden and wet, his men make their way toward 'good billets' of 'clean straw'—a reward they look forward to with 'amazing keenness'.[3] Ever conscious of their needs, May ensures the billets are cleaned and the fires lit—'fire putting new life' into the 'poor devils'.[4] Over the next two days, the company will march twenty-six miles back to the reserve billets at Candas. Once here, Captain May is able to rest. He allows himself a restorative hour. He and Lizzie, his horse, ride into a nearby wood that is blissfully untouched. He commits the details of this seemingly perfect, pastoral respite to his diary, just as he has done every day—good and bad—since arriving in France. Written in his tidy slanting hand, the entry is composed, like a love letter, to his wife, Maude:

> 7th December '15
>
> I stole an hour this afternoon and rode out towards Canaples for a look round and to forget the battalion and the war and for a little time to imagine that you were with me and that we had the open countryside to stroll through as so often we have done in the dear days before all the world were soldiers. It is pretty country out this road, especially to the left where the ground slopes down into a little valley the sides of which are dotted with clumps of larch and birch and other such spidery limbed, delicate trees. I turned off the highway out there and Lizzie and I strolled down the slopes to the valley's foot where we wandered along the edge of the woods cut off from all sight of man's handiwork and with only the wood-pigeons and the magpies for company. It was all damp and clean-looking, fresh and peaceful—one of the few pretty spots I have yet seen in France—and it cleared my head and made me happy and sent me back to my work refreshed.
>
> I thought of you as we strolled there, Lizzie with her reins slack wandering where she would and at her own pace and I longed that you could have been with me, for I know how you would have loved it and how happy we two would have been. The green rides of Epping came back to me in a flash. You in that black spotted muslin dress you used to wear looking cool and lovely […].
>
> It is a strange world. Here I am in the midst of men, of work and dirt and close to fire and steel and sudden death. My heart should be fired with martial ardour, I should have no thought for anything

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[1] Coningsby Dawson, letter, 6 November 1916, *Khaki Courage*, pp. 108-111.
[2] Charlie May, diary, 4-6 December 1915, *To Fight Alongside Friends: The First World War Diaries of Charlie May*, ed. by Gerry Harrison (London: William Collins, 2014), pp. 32-33.
[3] Ibid., 33.
[4] Ibid., 33.

> but the fighting I am paid for but instead my whole being is filled to the exclusion of all else with the thought of you, dear heart, of our darling Baby and of the happiness which has been ours […].[5]

This entry, intimate and highly detailed, poses a quiet but significant challenge to our dominant images of the First World War. The language here is not of 'disorder, chaos, [and] fragmentation', but of wholeness, beauty, and tranquillity.[6] Open country and quiet valleys temporarily replace the war's primary symbol—the trench.[7] 'Refreshed' by his experience of this restful and pastoral setting, May chooses to present himself not solely as officer, but as husband and father. The diary, in turn, is temporarily transformed from a site of ritual documentation to a creative space, where memory, fantasy, and self-reflection entwine. Whether to distract himself, to prolong his sense of restoration, or to simply find some sense of connection to his pre-war life and pre-war self, he here stages a highly-idealized scene between himself and Maude, casting himself in the role of lover—'you in that black spotted dress you used to wear'. A quiet form of control is subtly conveyed here through the language of movement. Man and horse choose to 'stroll' and 'wander', with 'reins slack'. These words, each repeated, replace 'prone', 'grovel', and 'stagg[er]' of previous entries, further reflecting the writer's sense of control and calm.[8] This sense of calm pervades both scene and diary page, as exasperated exclamation points and repeated lines are here replaced by clear and carefully drawn details of life: 'clumps of larch and birch', 'wood-pigeons', 'magpies', and Maude, looking 'cool and lovely' in her muslin. These images, both real and conjured, inspire a sense of renewal and restoration in the combatant—'it cleared my head and made me happy and sent me back to my work refreshed'. The frustration and resignation we have unconsciously come to expect of war writing is undoubtedly present in the entries that came before, and they, without question, will

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[5] Ibid., 35.
[6] Eric Leed, *No Man's Land: Combat & Identity in World War I* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1979), p. 28.
[7] In his seminal study, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, Paul Fussell writes, 'correctly or not, the current idea of "the Great War" derives primarily from images of the trenches in France and Belgium'. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1975), p. ix.
[8] May, 1 December 1915 and 28 November 1915, pp. 27, 30.

increase exponentially during the prolonged battles that are to come. But in this moment, there is no disillusion, no violence, and no mud. These war 'constants' here find counter-balance in a moment of quiet calm, a moment whose accompanying sense of restoration is extended through its being committed to the written page. But perhaps most significant, the experience inspires May to present, or perform, an identity that is fundamentally civilian; he is not solely 'refreshed' as an officer, but as a man, a husband, and a father.

In *No Man's Land*, Eric Leed argues that, '[i]n a war that lasted too long, the frontsoldier became a "riddle to himself" and a stranger to the "men and things" of his former life'.[9] Far from 'a stranger', May remains intimately connected. Safely removed from 'all sight of man's handiwork', memory and creativity are sparked. Once more in Epping Forest, he conjures, and imaginatively connects, with Maude. In other words, once the necessary conditions of writing are granted, May can reprise his civilian roles as man, as husband, and as lover. The diary here serves several significant, if subtle, functions. On its worn pages, May can assert some sense of control over the intermittent chaos of his surroundings; in doing so, he is granted temporarily distraction and escape. He can also imagine, and find a renewed sense of connection with Maude, here through a careful construction of an idealized scenario from their past. Perhaps most personally significant, as each diary entry is written specifically to his wife, he can, in a sense, carry her with him. She is a silent, but ever-present listener, an imagined, but nonetheless powerful, source of love and support. In this sense, the diary tethers Captain May to both his pre-war life and pre-war self; '[w]hen I write I feel just as with you as if we were talking together and I was recounting the day's experiences, as was my wont in the days before men had to come and fight […]'.[10] The blank page is here a safe space where May can reconnect to aspects of himself that have been (or must be) suppressed in the midst of

[9] Leed, p. 37.
[10] May, 13 January 1916, p. 68.

war's violence, deprivation, and trauma. Indeed, '[t]he diary offers', in Philippe Lejeune's words, 'a space and time protected from the pressures of life'.[11] It is a site, in short, where the civilian self can be re-asserted and maintained, a site of potential, if temporary, de-militarization.

Building on the work of Chapter One, this chapter continues the focus on multiplicity and fluidity in representations of combatant identity. It examines some of the functions of combatant life-writing on the western front, highlighting how the generic conventions of the diary and letter allowed men to both reclaim and repair their domestic identities as sons, brothers, husbands, and fathers. This repeated reclamation and repair, conducted largely during moments of rest, likely contributed to men's mental and emotional survival. In highlighting the multiple techniques men employ—both consciously and not—on the written page, this chapter hopes to bring new emphasis to the 'Arcadian Resources' that Paul Fussell has illuminated in the *Great War and Modern Memory*.[12] Indeed, while depictions of death and forced passivity are, without question, extremely common, images of restoration and rejuvenation also occur, at times striking an intermittent balance for men.[13] In demonstrating this, I will examine a significant facet of the combatant's frontline writing: the depiction of restful moments. These instances facilitated writing and reflection. This chapter, in other words, will also examine *the conditions* of writing in the midst of war. Beyond the obvious temporal restrictions of the firing line—more suited to brevity—it seems the more self-reflexive nature of the diary demands relative safety, calm, and distance. The restful moment, in short, facilitates writing, while writing, conversely, contributes to rest. In turning to the private page, the

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[11] Philippe Lejeune, 'How Do Diaries End?' *On Diary*, ed. by Jeremy Popkin and Julie Rak (Manoa: U of Hawaii P, 2009), p. 195.

[12] Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*. In 'Arcadian Resources', Fussell argues that 'Resources to the pastoral is an English mode of both fully gauging the calamities of the Great War and imaginatively protecting oneself against them' (p.255). This chapter hopes, in part, to bring new emphasis to these 'Arcadian Resourses' by considering them in relation to the conditions of life-writing. More specifically, it considers how such resources—whether experienced or conjured—aided men in the reprisal, repair, and reassertion of their domestic identities.

[13] Individual men's experience of rest was of course dependent on several factors that were not within their control, including position in the line, the battle engaged in, and rank. Captains and Officers, for example, generally had more opportunities for rest; they were also generally supplied with better billets.

diarist or letter writer can temporarily relinquish his (conscious) performance of public scripts of stoicism and endurance.[14] He can return, once again, to the more civilian facets of his identity, thereby maintaining a sense of connection to both his pre-war life and pre-war selves. In these restful moments, the blank page can offer a safe space, a private venue where he can confess fears to a sympathetic ear, conjure images of home, fantasize, and self-reflect.

However, while focusing on moments of rest and relative calm, this chapter does *not* seek to deny the extremity of the war's violence and suffering. Indeed, its brutality is unquestionable. As has been argued by Santanu Das, the First World War 'ravaged the male body on an unprecedented scale'.[15] The trenches would become an underground cesspool, where death and life where relentlessly churned together. The enemy, made all the more terrifying by being unseen, was often only a few yards away, leaving men prone and passive in the face of monstrous bombardment. Death in this context was random and violent, rendering individual acts of bravery rare and costly. And of course, this brutality would leave unseen scars on the male psyche, long after the Armistice was signed. This we know. And yet this is not the whole story. There are restful and potentially restorative areas and avenues of experience in war—however idealized and/or rhetorically staged—that have not yet been fully probed. Indeed, woven throughout countless diaries and collected letters are carefully drawn images of open fields, clean—and relished—brooks, makeshift football pitches, quiet churches, canteens, concerts, and camp baths. There is also depiction—and, in turn, rumination on—war's music and song, poetry, mother's cake, and 'extravagant' dinners that taste of home. Whether described simply to document the quotidian, to distract themselves, or to calm the anxiety of family and friends at home, these moments allowed men time to temporarily reprise their

[14] This potential release from public scripts and expectations is generally more possible in the diary, as the letter's known audience—and the writer's assumed expectations of that audience—inevitably influences both what is said and unsaid. Some of these generic distinctions will be discussed later in the chapter.
[15] Santanu Das, *Touch and Intimacy in First World War Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005), p. 4.

civilian roles as sons, friends, brothers, and husbands. This reprisal is both granted and facilitated by the blank page, a potential space of control, freedom, refuge, and escape amid war's chaos.

In examining how combatant men use the written page as a site for the maintenance and, at times, idealized reprisal of their domestic identities, I hope to greatly expand on the important work of Michael Roper, whose pioneering study, *The Secret Battle*, examines the vital role of family relationships in sustaining men on the front. However, while Roper is focused, in particular, on the importance of the correspondence between mothers and sons, I argue that the avenues and techniques (often unconsciously) employed in the emotional survival of men were far more multifaceted. In turn, I hope to illuminate experiences in war beyond those of disillusion, violence, and breakdown. In *Making Peace*, Susan Kent concludes that a disillusioned British public saw the war as exposing the 'inherent characteristics of masculinity'—'aggression, destructiveness, and violence'.[16] George Mosse, in his often-cited text, *Fallen Soldiers*, argues that the combatant was fundamentally disconnected from his civilian self, as the war's mechanized brutality unleashed his most 'primitive, instinctual, and violent' impulses.[17] In *The Soldier's Tale*, Samuel Hynes argues that the combatant's life is characterized primarily by 'strangeness', as he lived constantly amid a landscape of 'annihilation', 'in conditions of terrible [and] absolute difference'.[18] For both Paul Fussell and Eric Leed, the soldier's experience was primarily one of marginalization and alienation, as the war's horrific realities had supposedly estranged him from those at home.[19] In these studies of war, little reference is made to men's emotional experiences beyond that of 'repressed anger and bitterness', horror and suffering.[20] And yet the pages of men's frontline letters and diaries reveal a much broader range of both emotional and physical experiences. Indeed, these texts, at times,

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[16] Susan Kent, *Making Peace*: *The Reconstruction of Gender in Interwar Britain* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1993), p. 99.
[17] George Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers*: *Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1990), p. 163.
[18] Hynes, *A Soldiers Tale*: *Bearing Witness to Modern War* (London: Penguin, 1997), p. 21,53.
[19] Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, pp. 86-87; Leed, *No Man's Land*, pp. 4, 22, 37.
[20] Leed, pp. 188-89.

present a complex balance. As men move physically from frontline to support line to rest camp, and back, they often move, simultaneously, if subtly, through a range of complex emotions—relief, calm, excitement, boredom, frustration, anger, fear, longing, and love.[21]

In composing his war memoir, C.E. Carrington, for example, turned to his 1916 diary. He concluded that he had spent 101 days 'under fire', sixty-five of which were in front-line trenches.[22] This movement was vital to the Army's success and it was recognized as such. As argued by Paul Cornish, '[f]or the soldiers of the First World War fighting was an exceptional circumstance, rather than the norm […] [T]he frontline troops themselves were rotated to ensure that the time spent facing the enemy was balanced by periods of rest and, occasionally, home-leave'.[23] On the western front, time spent in billets and rest camps approximated three-fifths of an infantryman's service.[24] J.G Fuller estimates that the 7th Battalion Royal Sussex Regiment, for example, spent '42 per cent of [their] time in the front line or in support, 38 per cent in billeting areas, and 20 per cent in rest areas'.[25] This movement was a fundamental mechanism in the maintenance of morale.[26] It was also, in turn, fundamental to an alternative 'war story', one generally neglected in popular representations of the war's futility and disillusion: the story of resilience. In Captain May's words: 'The Army is

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[21] Generally speaking, infantry soldiers were on the front line for short periods, approximately four days, if not engaged in major battle. They would normally be moved from firing-line to support line, to dug-out to reserve line and rest (Ellis, *Eye Deep in Hell*, p. 28).
[22] C.E. Carrington, *A Subaltern's War* (London: Anthony Mott, 1984), pp. 95-96.
[23] Paul Cornish, 'The Daily Life of Soldiers', The British Library, www.bl.uk/world-war one/articles/the-daily-life-of-soldiers [assessed 15 November 2015].
[24] J. G. Fuller, *Troop Morale and Popular Culture in the British and Dominion Armies, 1914-1918* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), p. 58.
[25] Ibid., p. 58.
[26] It should be noted that men's activities when behind the line were also varied and largely dependent on their rank (the majority of men whose writing is examined here were of higher ranks—officers, lieutenants). Private D.J. Sweeney, an 'old regular', having enlisted in 1907, for example, writes the following in a 1915 letter: 'We do not get much time to ourselves—We start work at 7 o'c a.m. we march from our billets to our work which is 5 miles and we work until 4 o'c p.m. and get back to […] billets at 5.30 o.c. p.m. and by the time we have finished our dinners it is nearly 7 o.c. p.m. we have to be in bed by 8 o.c. p.m. But I am quite satisfied with this work'. (D.J. Sweeney, letter, 17 August 1915, IWM. Documents. 7397 (76/226/1).

wonderful. One day it strains and strives and fights with blood and noise and dirt predominant, the next it returns to all its old starch and buckram […]'.[27]

Many, if not most, of men's lengthier, and generally more self-reflexive, diary entries and letters—such as the above entry from Captain May—are written during moments of rest, where men, by virtue of the Army's rotations, have been distanced from the firing line. Indeed, it is here that men's identities as fathers, sons, brothers, and husbands are most clearly depicted and performed, where personal (and characteristic) turns of phrase and nicknames are more frequently used—'Dear Small Wife'—and where his personal meanings and values, for both the war and his role within it, are reasserted or reframed.[28] This speaks, at least in part, to the nature and *conditions* of life-writing in war. In 'Spiritual Journals in France', Phillippe Lejeune briefly considers the tools and basic elements required for self-reflexive writing; he notes that once light, paper, stable backing, pen and ink are acquired, the diarist need only to write the date at the top of a page, thereby 'pav[ing] the way for the personalization of the subject'.[29] These elements, however, are the sole requirements of the peacetime diary—or, as we have seen, the home front diary—but not of the soldier's. They, understandably, take for granted the writer's ability to sit or stand upright, his protection from the elements, his ability to obtain ample light, and, most important, his general sense of physical comfort, safety, and wholeness; they take for granted, in other words, his distance from potential maiming and death, along with the general sense of humanness and subjecthood that accompanies it. Indeed, outside the generally safer, and comparatively more comfortable, reserve lines and rest camps, these conditions are rarely givens in the warzone. If, as Elaine Scarry argues, the 'concrete objects of consciousness'—one's moral convictions, political affiliations, treasured memories, usual behaviours and values, etc—all fade into 'weightlessness' in the face of extreme pain and in the

[27] May, diary, 7 December 1915, p. 35.
[28] E.S. Bennett, letters, IWM, Documents. 3695 (96/3/1).
[29] Phillipe Lejeune, 'On Today's Date', *On Diary*, p. 80.

presence of imminent death, then the 'personalization of the subject' Lejeune theorizes as the diary's defining feature, is conditional, at least in part, on the soldier's position in relation to the front, as well as on his general sense of safety and wholeness.[30]

I will turn now to a detailed analysis of combatant writing, beginning first with an examination of the conditions of self-reflexive writing on the western front. Though men's references to the temporary restoration of cleanliness and comfort might appear innocuous, they in fact mark a 'first stage' of return to the normal, the mundane, and the civilian. They mark a return to the personal, social, and cultural world, which had been rendered 'weightless' by the near constant presence, and threat, of death.[31] Having considered the conditions of writing on the western front, I will then turn to an examination of life-writing's function as a tool in men's reclamation and repair of their domestic identities as sons, husbands, brothers, and fathers.

I. 'As we get further from the line, things are more civilised': Depicting moments of calm and restoration[32]

i. Restorative rituals and the *conditions* of reflexive writing: Water and Fire

In his often-cited study of the 'transformation of personality in war', Eric Leed focuses primarily on images of confinement, invisibility, and death.[33] For Leed, men's experience of war is dominated by disorder and fragmentation; the war's mud, blood, and uncanny dead created terrifying ambiguities for the frontline soldier, which led to an 'effacement of self'.[34] While this is true to a certain extent, it does not tell the whole story. Of the over forty diaries, collected letters, and combatant novels that

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[30] Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1985), pp. 31-32.
[31] Ibid, p.31-32.
[32] Harry Drinkwater, diary, 13 February 1916, *Harry's War: The Great Diary of Harry Drinkwater*, ed. by Jon Cooksey and David Griffiths (London: Ebury Press, 2013), p. 41.
[33] Leed, pp. 1, 18-21.
[34] Ibid., p.23.

make up the source material for this chapter, *all* include countless images of death, mud, and desolation. The word 'strange' or 'strangeness'—a signifier of the war's ambiguities—is near ubiquitous. However, other tropes and image patterns *do* emerge when men are relieved from the firing line. Words and phrases centring on feelings of rebirth, renewal, and cleanliness, for example, are extremely common. In the chapter's opening diary entry, Charlie May describes his and Lizzie's surroundings as 'clean-looking, fresh and peaceful', sending him 'back to [his] work refreshed'.[35] In October 1915, E.K. Smith recreates his surroundings using similar language in a letter to his mother: 'I am now sitting at a table on which are drinks and cigars and other signs of rest and comfort and there is a fire in the room, also I am feeling clean and comfortable'.[36] In the same letter, he writes of the 'great sight' it is to see 'the men rushing about after their bath (which is a big tank accommodating about ten of them) like little boys in sheer high spirits'.[37] The only notable event recorded by F.S. Collings on 28 August 1915 was his 'wash and shave' in the wood.[38] While seemingly insignificant, these extremely common references—and their repeated description—hold subtle significance. If the western front's overwhelming and engulfing mud represented the ultimate anxiety, as it drew men into what Santanu Das terms, '[the war's] chaotic indifferentiation', then its removal marks a temporary return to wholeness, to control, and to the self.[39] The etymological root of the word 'clean' ties it to conceptions of both safety and intactness. The clean body is protected from dirt and disease; in religious doctrine, the word signifies a removal of that which is immoral and impure, allowing the individual's soul safe passage to the afterlife. The clean body can also be *seen* in its entirety—its borders, intact, are made clear. The result is a sense of control and containment, both of which are vital to sustaining the sense of self. Men's frequent diary and letter

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[35] May, diary, 7 December 1915, p. 35.
[36] E.K. Smith, letter, 6 October 1915, *Letters Sent From France: Service with the Artist's Rifles and the Buffs*, December 1914 to December 1915 (London: J. Cobb, n.d.), p. 103.
[37] Ibid., p. 103.
[38] F.S. Collings, diary, 28 August 1915, IWM, Documents. 7113 (77/124/1).
[39] Das, p. 45.

entries describing not only the ritual of cleansing, but also its self-renewing effects, marks it as an important coping mechanism. In experiencing—and then again in describing—these moments of safety and wholeness, men are brought back into contact with the domestic, the mundane, and the civilian. The resulting sense of normalcy, as we shall see, facilitates a life-writing that is often more self-reflexive in nature.

In his important study of touch and intimacy in First World War literature, Das argues that the aggressive and inescapable mud of the trenches had 'blurr[ed] the boundaries of the body and confus[ed] the categories of subject and object'. In doing so, it 'engendered a perceptual crisis', bringing about 'a return to the world of myth and monsters'.[40] This is undoubtedly true. The pages of men's diaries and letters refer constantly to mud. 'I am lathered up to the eyes in mud', writes Lawrence Gamble on 25 September 1915.[41] Captain May describes his frustrated attempts to build paths through a 'sea of mud' in December of the same year,[42] while Harry Drinkwater depicts his fellow soldiers as 'a mass of mud' leaning against the trench wall'.[43] Far from 'swimmers into cleanness leaping', as envisioned by Rupert Brooke, men often found themselves 'wedged in mud', unrecognizable, and 'helpless'.[44] In these passages, words and phrases like crawl, crouch, caked, and groped dominate, signifying the writer's sense of helpless immobility. Far from propaganda's popular figure of definitive action, here the soldier is forced into an animal-like position, scraping and crawling on hands, knees, and belly in the face of bombardment. The war's muddy terrain renders the human form primeval, turning it back into something raw and primitive; '[we became]

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[40] Das, *Touch and Intimacy*, p. 45. It should be noted that the frequency (and form) of washing or bathing was extremely varied on the western front. Some men—depending largely on rank and location—describe having to wait almost 20 days for a camp bath, while others write of more frequent opportunities to bathe in canals or streams. Generally, upon leaving the trenches men were supplied with a clean change of clothes. L. Gamble, for example, writes of 'hav[ing] a good bath, first one for 19 days and a clean change', in a October of 1915 letter (IWM. Docs. 21318 (15/14/1), while C. Stockbridge writes of 'bathing in the canal which runs right by our billet', in May of 1915 (IWM.Docs. 15796 (07/41/1).
[41] L. Gamble, letter, 25 September 1915, IWM, Documents. 21318 (15/14/1).
[42] May, diary, 3 December 1915, p. 32.
[43] Drinkwater, diary, 14 December 1915, p.25
[44] Ibid., 7 January 1916, p. 31.

hairy-looking creatures that crawled in the earth', writes Private Len Smith, 'yes like worms on our bellies'.[45] This, for many, was the war's most dreaded challenge; 'to find mud on your person, in your food, to have to stand in mud, see mud, sleep in mud and to continue to smile—that's what tests courage'.[46]

My aim, therefore, is not to deny mud's extreme, and terrifying, pervasiveness, but rather to highlight that this sensation, while often prolonged, was temporary. The trench's mud and blood could be removed, temporarily restoring not only the physical, but also the emotional self. Indeed, while trench experience is dominated by what cannot be seen—whether it be the enemy, falling shells, or one's own, mud-engulfed comrades—the reserve line or rest camp is characterized by a sense of renewal and the return, in a sense, of sight. Newly clean and shaven men can once more be recognized as individuals; the removal of the war's dirt and blood is a restorative, almost ritualistic, process. Men are no longer indistinguishable automatons, monsters, or primeval crawling animals, but human, 'standing upright in the daylight'.[47] Writing to his mother, Second Lieutenant A.H. Crerar, describes his watching 'human beings emerge[ ] in clean shirts' after their company bath in 'a little hutment by a brook'.[48] After removing the shirt he had worn for thirty-four days—'thick with dried mud'—Harry Drinkwater 'felt a new man'.[49] After returning from the line, E.K. Smith writes: 'I had a bath and a shave and a haircut and a shampoo and a change, and began to feel normal again, you would hardly have recognized me before'.[50] After describing the war's mud as 'Napoleon's fourth antagonist' in a letter to his younger brothers, Coningsby Dawson highlights a single word that seems to sum up the most vital contrast of his current, billeted surroundings: 'I had a boiling

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[45] Private Len Smith, diary, undated, *Drawing Fire: The Diary of a Great War Soldier and Artist* (London: Harper Collins, 2012), unnumbered pages.
[46] Dawson, 4 February 1917, *Khaki Courage*, p. 175.
[47] Drinkwater, letter, 28 April 1916, p. 67.
[48] 2nd Lieutenant A.H. Crerar, letter, 15 September 1916, IWM, Documents. 12155.
[49] Drinkwater, diary, 25 December 1915, p.28-29.
[50] Smith, letter, 13 April 1915, p. 82.

bath […] and am CLEAN'—this, the only highlighted word amid his hundreds of letters. The significant space granted to such moments on the diary and letter page speak to their important—if simple—role. Beyond ending the physical discomfort wrought by the war's dirt and mud—and the incessant lice that came with it—a simple bath could restore a sense of normalcy. 'If cleanliness is next to Godliness, […] lousiness is next to Hell', writes Captain May on 2 January 1916.[51] After his return to this most basic form of normalcy, of humanness, the soldier feels renewed—more himself. It is *then* that he very often turns to the blank page, seeking to reassert or reclaim his identities as son, husband, and father, among others.

If the war's landscape rendered men primeval, engulfing them in the midst of its base materiality, then the rest camp bath marks a 'first stage' of return. It is a re-establishment of subjectivity's physical borders, a return to the human, social world. The careful documenting of these restorative moments marks a 'second stage', a further progression back to the cultural. As outlined in the chapter's introduction, Elaine Scarry argues that physical trauma causes the world to collapse. The 'concrete objects of consciousness'—one's moral convictions, treasured memories, and passions—all fade into 'weightlessness' in the face of extreme pain and in the presence of death.[52] In the context of the First World War's trenches, where pain, discomfort, and death were ever-present, the 'concrete objects' of the civilian world did indeed, for many, fade. 'Most things that ever happened in England are now wrapped in thick mists of age […]', writes G.R. Barlow in a letter to his Aunt, '[t]he old impressions have been obscured'.[53] Men were repeatedly brought back from this 'weightlessness', however, through their re-enacting, and reconnecting to the 'everyday', first in practice—the simple bath—and then in writing, through which they could return further to the quotidian and the civilian through imagining and reprising their pre-war roles and identities. In his

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[51] May, diary, 2 January 1916.
[52] Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain,* pp.31-32.
[53] G.R. Barlow, letter, 20 August 1916, IWM, Documents. 2755 (86/40/1).

diary in January 1916, Harry Drinkwater describes his temporary 'regaining' of a simple form of 'paradise' after his and his comrade's wash and change of clothes. Having previously described the trenches as a 'purgatory', where men are unable to 'walk upright', he here describes the return of the human, the man—the most basic forms of identity:[54]

> Ward and I have just been down to the village church, where the Church Army have a canteen. We sat in a pew and had a tin of pears between us, biscuits we handled with clean hands. We heard music, someone was playing the organ; it was paradise regained.[55]

His specific reference to 'clean hands'—the only part of the body whose skin is visible to him—is significant. Cleansed of the war's physical traces, they are a sign of his safe separation from the war's 'chaotic indifferentiation'.[56] This physical separation allows him to fully re-enter, and re-engage with both his civilian identity and the civilian world—with its intact buildings, its food, and its music. Meaning is once again sought through narration, a meaning that is further solidified through its being committed to the clean blank page. Indeed, one of the diary's fundamental functions, argues Lejeune, is found in its ability to 'freeze time', 'to accumulate traces […] to give life the consistency and continuity it lacks'.[57] In his study of the life-writing of trauma survivors, psychologist J.W. Pennebaker, furthermore, found that the more positive the words used by the traumatized, the greater the likelihood of positive effect.[58] The documentation of the positive experience, and the act of naming the positive feelings in association with it—restoration, renewal, calm—functions in securing the sense of self within it. The 'freezing' of the positive moment extends its positive effects. Indeed, once clean and comfortable, men's writing becomes not only more positive, but often more self-reflexive in nature, signifying a return to a stronger, more unified sense of his identity—first as human, and then, in turn, as a friend, husband and/or son.

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[54] Drinkwater, letters, 28 April 1916, 19 December 1915, p. 67, 24.
[55] Ibid., 11 January 1916, p. 36.
[56] Das, p. 45.
[57] Philippe Lejeune, 'How Do Diaries End?', p. 195.
[58] J.W. Pennebaker, T.H. Mayne, and M.E. Francis, 'Linguistic predictors of adaptive bereavement', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 72 (1997): 863-871.

The letters of Coningsby Dawson provide an example of how writing is facilitated by this cyclical return to the normal through cleansing. Written to his family on 6 November 1916, the letter describes the simple but powerful pleasure of camp baths:

> My Dear Ones,
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> Such a wonderful day it has been—I came down last night from twenty-four hours in the mud, where I have been observing. I'd spent the night in a hole dug in the side of the trench and a dead Hun forming part of the roof. I'd sat there reliving so many things—the ecstatic moments of my life […]. Then, as I say, I came back to the gun position to learn that I was to have one day off at the back of the lines. You can't imagine what this meant to me, one day where there is no shell-fire, one day where you don't turn up corpses with your tread! […].
>
> My first objective was the military baths; I lay in hot water for half an hour and read the advertisements of my book. As I lay there, for the first time since I've been out I began to get a half-way true prospective of myself. What's left of the egotism of the author came to life, and—now laugh—I planned my next novel, planned it to the sounds of men singing because they were clean for the first time in months. I left my towels and soap […] and went prancing off along country roads in search of almost forgotten places where people don't kill one another. Was it imagination? There seemed to me to be a different look in the faces of the men I met—for the time being they were neither hunters nor hunted.[59]

Having spent twenty-four hours in the primeval, underground world, where death is ever-present, Dawson resurfaces. Given the day off, his 'first objective' is immediately clear: the military baths. His description here is of the gradual return of the civilian self, a return wrought by water and then solidified through its commitment to the written page. The language is of rebirth, renewal, and transformation. Once the physical 'boundaries' of the self—the skin—are re-established through the simple ritual of cleansing, the contours of the authentic (behavioural and emotional) self can follow: 'I began to get a half-way true perspective of myself'. It is telling that Dawson's 'true perspective' of self is associated not with his role as soldier, but as author. The more authentic self here remains the civilian, just as it began in Chapter One. In this baptism, creativity is also reborn—'I planned my next novel'. Life-Writing is thus facilitated by the sense of normalcy—and safety—that cleansing provides. Dawson is newly inspired as a writer, while his fellow soldiers, also newly cleansed of the

[59] Dawson, 6 November 1916, pp. 108-111.

war's mud and blood, become boyish singers. A more contrasting image to Mosse's men—dominated by 'primitive, instinctual, and violent' impulses—is difficult to imagine.[60]

While clean water could restore a sense of temporary normalcy, so too could the well-lit dugout—light, of course, also being amongst the most basic components of writing. While the ability to light a candle in itself meant one was a safe distance from the firing-line—or the ever watchful eye of the sniper—its light temporarily banished the sense of isolation and invisibility that often characterized the trenches. While serving in Gallipoli, J.S. Gatley describes his unit's guarding against raiding parties in the darkness: '[it] is very trying work as each man is 12 yards apart and so has no-one to speak to, and so each of us feel quite alone as we cannot see each other in the dark'.[61] Men constantly moved alone in the darkness, their hands and bodies unexpectedly coming into contact with the dead. In a letter sent from the front, Wilfred Owen writes, 'I have not seen any dead, I have done worse. In the dank air I have perceived it, and in the darkness, felt'.[62] Men could often hear, but not see, falling bombs, wounded men, and vermin. Darkness was inevitably tied to death. Light, in this context, often meant safety, control, and closeness. It also, in turn, facilitated a return to the social and the cultural. Men, by the simple glow of a candle, could see each other, roughly create 'domestic' spaces, cook together, gaze upon photographs or a treasured talisman, write and re-read letters. Wilfrid Cove writes of his playing 'a good game of chess by candle' in November of 1916.[63] It is similarly by the glow of a candle that Coningsby Dawson is able to conjure home. Writing to his mother in November of 1916, he describes the gun-pit as being made 'very cheery' by the light of a petrol can fire. When he goes forward once more, he tells her, '[he]

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[60] George Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1990), p. 162.
[61] J.S. Gatley, diary, 4 June 1915, IWM, Documents. 15727 (07/40/1).
[62] Wilfred Owen, *Wilfred Owen: Collected Letters*, Ed. Harold Owen and John Bull (London: and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 429.
[63] Wilfrid Cove, letter, 15 November 1916, *Love Letters of the Great War*, ed. by Mandy Kirkby (Basingstoke and Oxford: Macmillan, 2014) p. 33.

shall also take candles and a copy of *Ann Veronica'*, so that '[he] can forget time'.[64] Captain May too readily recognizes light's restorative power. As D Company returns from the line in December 1915, he immediately ensures that the fires are lit, as fire's warmth breathes 'new life' into his men.[65] It seems that once control of the physical senses and physical environment are regained—touch (skin), sight, sound, taste—the emotional and social self can follow. If, as Elaine Scarry argues, the cultural world fades in the face of extreme trauma and imminent death, then its return begins once the physical body is relived of pain and can once more be confirmed as safe, intact, and human.[66] Water and light, the most basic components not only of life, but of the 'everyday', are both intimately connected to intactness. They make the physical body visible, confirm its borders, and restore one's most basic sense of control, all of which are vital to the maintenance of identity.[67] Once this sense of safety, of wholeness, is re-established, the soldier can take further steps back toward the individual. He can, as we shall see in the sections that follow, demilitarize in moments of rest by re-connecting to the daily activities and routines of his civilian life; this reconnection and maintenance of the civilian self is done both in practice and in writing—through, as we shall see, the use of recurring domestic image patterns, the conjuring of both fantasies and memories of touch, and through cathartic expression and confession.

ii. Restorative rituals: The crafting and conjuring of home and the reprisal of the soldier's domestic identities

When positioned at a safe distance from the front-line trench, men not only felt more civilised, but crafted more 'civilised' spaces. Indeed, once clean and warm, diarists often document another form of 'restorative ritual': the creating of 'home'. After being relieved from the line in December of 1915,

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[64] Dawson, 4 November 1916, pp. 104-105.
[65] May, 4 December 1915, p. 33.
[66] Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, p. 32.
[67] Modern psychologists frequently assert the individual's need to have some sense of control over events, as well as a need to predict the future. See, for example, S. Joseph's article 'Attributional Processes, Coping and Post-traumatic Stress Disorder', in *Post-traumatic Stress Disorders: Concepts and Therapy*, ed. by W. Yule (Chichester 1999), pp. 51-70.

Captain May and his men reach Fourdrinoy, a tiny village whose streets are 'ankle deep in mud'.[68] As this will be 'home' for an extended period, the first task is devoted to the 'good work' of 'tidy[ing] up and mak[ing] the place as hospitable as possible'.[69] Men left the firing lines 'hungry' for 'something that in some small measure would echo home life', writes Private Smith.[70] Of course, what form these shadow homes took depended largely on men's location at the front, along with their rank—officers generally being granted the more enviable spaces.[71] Small touches of the familiar, however, in the form of clocks, mirrors, or family photographs, could adorn the walls of even the simplest dugout. When further removed from the line, men were generally billeted in evacuated civilian houses. At other times, they were housed in stables, tents, or huts built by the Royal Engineers.[72] Regardless of the physical space, however, combatants found small ways to connect to the familiar on the written page. This restorative and often creative task allowed men to re-establish a sense of connection to their civilian lives; it allowed them to experience some sense of normalcy and control, however fleeting. In this section, I will examine how men use the written page to redraw such connections to the domestic. The characteristic feature of the epistolary form—its writer's intense awareness of his/her audience in particular—is significant here. As the soldier writes to family or friends, the home spaces in which they reside are more easily conjured, so too are the soldier's various facets of self—as son, husband, brother, and friend. The letter's known audience demands a reprisal of these roles. It also, as we shall see, creates opportunities for drawing connections, for bridging gaps, both geographic and experiential. This bridging, which draws those at home into the soldier's frontline surroundings, functions in combating isolation and alienation; it allows for some sense—though limited—of continued shared experience, this being vital to men's emotional

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[68] Charlie May, diary, 21 December 1915, p. 49.
[69] Ibid., p. 49.
[70] Len Smith, diary, unnumbered page.
[71] Captain May's diary provides a clear example on 5 December 1915: 'The men are all comfortably tucked down on good, clean straw and the officers are in various cottages'., p.33.
[72] Gordon Corrigan, *Mud, Blood and Poppycock: Britain and the First World War* (London: Cassell, 2003), p. 89.

survival. Exemplified here is the letter's marrying of function and expression; it indeed highlights, as Margaretta Jolly and Liz Stanley argue, the 'affective dimension of the communicative form', a dimension whose significance is greatly enhanced by war's profoundly dehumanizing violence and deprivation.[73]

In *Under Fire*, Henri Barbusse vividly describes the combatant's brief escape from the frontline through letter writing: '[a] sentimental gentleness seems to have overspread little Eudore, who is…lost in meditation, pencil in hand, eyes on paper…He has gone home'.[74] In writing and reading letters from home, men were drawn back into the lives they had left behind. This maintained connection was vital to the maintenance of morale. Between 1914 and 1918, the British Army Postal Service delivered roughly two billion letters; '[i]n 1917 alone, over 19,000 mailbags crossed the English Channel each day, transporting letters and parcels to British troops on the Western Front'.[75] These tangible pieces of home were fundamental to what Michael Roper terms men's 'emotional survival'.[76] They allowed combatants to remain connected not only to their family and friends but also to their pre-war selves. 'Letters keep one civilised', writes Dawson on 6 November 1916.[77] Writing in January of the same year, Harry Drinkwater describes the significance the letter held for the exhausted soldier,

> [w]ith the ration party come the letters for us. Very pathetic it is sometimes to watch fellows read these. Every few moments they will bring them out and re-read again or crawl off to some temporary shelter and, with the aid of a torch held low, read and re-read again. It is our only touch with civilisation which we feel we are losing contact with.[78]

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[73] Margaretta Jolly and Liz Stanley, 'Letters as/not a genre', p103.
[74] Henri Barbusse, *Under Fire* (1916; London: Penguin, 2004), p. 149.
[75] Amanda Mason and Ellen Parton, 'Letters to Loved Ones', Imperial War Museum, www.iwm.org.uk/history/letters-to-loved-ones [accessed 22 January 2016].
[76] Michael Roper, *The Secret Battle*, p. 3.
[77] Dawson, letter, 6 November 1916, p. 114.
[78] Harry Drinkwater, diary, 7 January 1916, p. 32.

Here the letter is described as precious and coveted; the combatant savours its details. Indeed, it is fitting that the day's mail is delivered along with the day's rations, as it too provides sustenance.[79] This was especially the case when men were positioned in the front lines, where mail was a rare source of comfort amid desolation. 'A dismal place for guard, rats scurrying and running down stairs at night. Duties 2 hours on and 4 off. Nice parcel from Aggie today', succinctly writes R.W. Wilson in his diary.[80] The letter in these surroundings—a tangible sign of love and support—offered a temporarily escape; men could travel back to home, reconnecting to facets of self beyond that of the martial. 'I can forget all about this beastliness while I read [your] letter[s]', writes Private Appleby, to his sweetheart in October 1916.[81] 'Darling Mother I don't know how I can explain to you how your letter cheered me up', writes Cecil Stockbridge in November of 1915, 'imagine yourself in a trench, cold, clammy, not washed or shaved for nine days, tired, and having been under shell fire every day. Picture it all, and then a letter comes, above all from home. What a Godsend! It makes one forget all and go about cheerful in spite of the circumstances'.[82]

In both reading and writing letters, men were drawn back into their roles as sons, fathers, and husbands. Indeed, domestic responsibilities did not cease with the crossing of the Channel. On 14 May 1915, Lieutenant Colonel E.W. Hermon assured his wife that he would send her 'a cheque to cover rates & taxes when he [got his] bankbook'.[83] E.K. Smith thanks his mother for keeping him abreast of his father's 'business matters' in January 1915. In December of the following year, Wilfrid Cove reassures his daughter, Marjorie, that, 'Santa Claus will come just as usual' this year, even

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[79] Letters were, of course, similarly coveted by those at home, as they confirmed (for the time being) the safety of husbands, sons, and brothers. Writing of the importance of the letters she receives from her future husband, Winifred Blackburn tells him that she 'regard[s] them as sacred. Were the house to catch on fire I would endeavour to save them before anything'. (Letters of C.T. Newman, Imperial War Museum, Documents. 12494 (03/5/1), p. 181.
[80] R.W. Wilson, diary, 28 December date (p.'28'), Imperial War Museum, Documents. 7066 (77/74/1).
[81] Private Eric Appleby, letter, 17 October 1916, *Love Letters of the Great War*, p. 87.
[82] C. Stockbridge, letter, 1 November 1915, IWM, Documents. 15796 (07/41/1).
[83] Lieutenant Colonel E.W. Hermon, 14 May 1915, *For Love and Courage: Lieutenant Colonel E.W. Hermon from the Western Front 1914-1917*, ed. by Anne Nason, London: Preface, 2008), p. 23.

though she will 'have to do without Daddy'.[84] These men held martial and domestic roles simultaneously, countering assertions that 'discontinuity and distance' defined relationships between the front and home.[85] The significance of the letter received, however, has been well documented in previous war scholarship. In contrast, the letter sent by the serving soldier has not. And yet, men's written responses were equally vital to the repair and maintenance of the civilian, domestic self. Indeed, the frontline letter was not simply a site of communication, but also of creative performance and dialogue; letters granted men repeated opportunities to reprise their civilian, domestic roles. They facilitated, in short, the construction of a sense of continuity and normality in the context of war's chaos.

In his study of soldier's war narratives, Samuel Hynes rightly argues that '[war] is a culture. Military traditions, values, and patterns of behaviour penetrate every aspect of army life'.[86] This, to a certain extent, is undoubtedly true. If a man is to be a successful soldier, he must suspend his most basic civilian values. Adopting martial law, the normally non-violent man must fight and kill; he must also repeatedly, and willingly, face death. He cannot run, as self-preservation, the most basic human instinct, becomes both shameful and unlawful. 'It seems a dream from which I shall wake up. Am I really killing men day by day? Am I really in jeopardy myself', writes Coningsby Dawson in a letter to his Father in September 1916.[87] In this culture of violence and obedience, even the most ordinary human acts and feelings are altered. Acts of extreme aggression, once monstrous, are prized. Humour, in turn, becomes darker, a reflection of men's often uncanny and uncontrollable surroundings. Even friendship, in this 'war culture', is changed, replaced by something seemingly more intimate between men—comradeship.[88] And yet these changes in men's values and behaviours

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[84] Cove, letter, 4 December 1916, *Love Letters of the Great War*, p. 34.
[85] Eric Leed, *No Man's Land*, pp. 22-23.
[86] Hynes, *Soldier's Tale*, p. 8.
[87] Dawson, letter, 19 September 1916, *Khaki Courage*, pp. 64-65.
[88] Hynes, *Soldier's Tale*, p. 8-11.

do not signal a break from their civilian identities, as Hynes suggests; nor are disillusion and numbness their primary emotional experiences. Indeed, in order to maintain a coherent sense of identity in the midst of war, men must attach meaning to action and value to suffering—this, an often-unconscious task, is achieved though narrative, be it spoken, written, or simply imagined. In the words of psychologist Dan McAdams, '[i]n order to live well, with unity and purpose, we compose a heroic narrative of the self that illustrates essential truths'.[89] In 'telling' this narrative—to both himself and others—the healthy man must integrate his 'remembered past, perceived present, and anticipated future', thereby creating and maintaining a coherent sense of his moral self. For a great many combatants, this meaning, or 'essential truth', is found in home. The letter form, with its known audience, offered repeated opportunities for such narrative re-framing, while its dialogistic nature could also bring confirmation, approval, and re-assurance of the depicted self. 'I hope you will not mind me telling you that I volunteered so as to help protect you', writes Private G.R. Barlow in a letter to his aunt Alice in January 1918.[90] For Coningsby Dawson, nation was home, a home regenerated by war's fire. In a letter home, he writes of fighting not only for his family, but also for 'an England purged of all weakness, stripped of flabbiness, [and] regenerated by sacrifice'.[91] These masculine identities, asserted (and bolstered) through letter writing, are grounded in narratives of protection and sacrifice—themes that attach value and meaning to men's experience of the war's violence and fragmentation.

Furthermore, in narrating their experiences in letters, men constantly connect their frontline surroundings to their civilian lives. 'Your letters reached me in the midst of a bombardment—I read them in a kind of London fog of gunpowder smoke', writes Dawson on 1 October 1916.[92] Barlow

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[89] Dan P. McAdams, *The Stories We Live By: Personal Myths and the Making of the Self* (New York and London: The Guilford Press, 1993), p. 11.
[90] G.R. Barlow, letter, 6 January 1918, IWM, Documents. 2755 (86/40/1).
[91] Dawson, 20 December 1916, p. 139.
[92] Ibid., 1 October 1916, p. 76.

equates the sounds of bombardment with 'magnificent music' in April of the same year.[93] Describing the trenches to his mother in July of 1915, E.K. Smith equates their necessarily 'curly' construction with 'the Hampton Court maze'.[94] In these moments, through simile and metaphor, the past experiences and perceptions of the civilian intertwine with the current surroundings of the soldier. While such comparisons were meant to aid those at home in imagining (and understanding) combatant life, they also likely provided comfort to fighting men—making familiar that which is profoundly strange and terrifying.[95] It marks an attempt to domesticate, at least in some small way, the unrestrained brutality of war. These comparisons are invited by the epistolary form, its inherent relation to dialogue demands that common ground be established in order for the writer to be understood by the recipient. Furthermore, the geographic, temporal, and experiential gaps—fundamental components of letter writing—often invite descriptions of one's physical surroundings. Indeed, even the trenches themselves are tied to home, a fact relayed in the letters of countless men. As described by Private Len Smith,

> The trenches themselves too are very interesting here, with human touches—they cross and recross each other like streets and even have names painted on boards—there's "Coldstream Lane", "Glasgow Road", "Harley Street", "Old Kent Road", "Hertsford Lane" etc. all giving an unmistakable clue to former occupants of these "front seats of the stalls".[96]

In drawing and relaying such connections, however tangential, to the familiar, men attempt to normalize their new and often terrifying surroundings. Such small 'human touches' undoubtedly aided in the maintenance of self in war; they reminded men of their reasons for fighting and connected them, if only for a moment, to home.

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[93] Barlow, letter, 12 April 1916.
[94] E.K. Smith, letter, 4 July 1915, *Letters Sent From France: Service with the Artists' Rifles and The Buffs, December 1914 to December 1915* (London: J. Cobb, date?), p. 68.
[95] This was, of course, not the case for all men. For some, thinking too much of home only made front-line experience more challenging. Private B.A. Reader, for example, writes: 'We work all day and every day here (no half day off on sat.). But as when I am not working I start thinking of home, which is the worst thing to do out here, I am glad to have [my] mind kept occupied'. (letter, 25 March 1916, IWM, Documents. 4127 (83/3/1).
[96] Private Len Smith, diary, undated, *Drawing Fire: The Diary of a Great War Soldier and Artist* (London: Harper Collins, 2012), unnumbered pages.

Significant space on both the letter and diary page is also granted to the physical spaces men create and adorn when safely removed from the firing line—spaces that are distinctly domestic in form and description. This, too, like camp baths, can be a restorative endeavour, as men are able to reconnect to their past identities, thereby reestablishing a sense of normalcy. Gunner Wilfrid Cove describes decorating the walls of his dugout with his daughter's drawings in December of 1916: 'My dear little Majorie […] I have pinned your crayoned tulips on the wall of my dugout bedroom just beside your photograph'.[97] Writing to his wife in May 1915, Rowland Feilding describes the elaborately carved walls of the chalk trenches as being akin to 'an art gallery', complete with 'model prayer books', 'regimental crest[s]', and 'bits of philosophy that show the trend of the men's minds.'[98] In a letter to his 'dear Aunt Alice', G.R. Barlow writes of the enviable billets of some men, whose walls are 'papered with beauty'—images of young women taken from 'Sketche[r] and Tattler [ ]' magazines.[99] In describing such 'touches of home' in letters, men seek to reassure their recipient—and undoubtedly themselves—of the continued presence of their civilian, domestic identities, not only as fathers and husbands, but also as artists, writers, craftsmen—among the innumerable other possible facets of their pre-war identities.

Some 'home' spaces were given more elaborate construction, as men attempt to artfully create intact mirror versions of home spaces—complete with table, chair, and jam pot. As sources of immense pride, these carefully (and creatively) constructed dwellings are often given meticulous description. The functions of such passages are multiple. On one level, the concentrated focus on documenting such spaces undoubtedly served as a mechanism for distraction; choosing to focus on the positive, on the familiar, is an effective means of *avoiding* focus on the terrors and/or tedium of

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[97] Wilfrid Cove, letter, 4 December 1916, *Love Letters of the Great War*, ed. by Mandy Kirkby (Basingstoke and Oxford: Macmillan, 2014), pp. 34-35. Original letter is part of the Liddle Collection, Private Papers (GSO375).
[98] Rowland Feilding, letter, 22 May 1915, *War Letters to a Wife: France and Flanders, 1915-1919*, ed. by Jonathan Walker (1929; Staplehurst: Spellmount, 2001), p. 9.
[99] G.R. Barlow, Letter, 10 August 1916, IWM, Documents. 2755 (86/40/1).

the trenches. In *Trauma Rehabilitation After War and Conflict,* Martz, et al. assert that active distraction and avoidance can be highly effective—in the short term—in allowing continued function of traumatized people; 'avoidance', they assert, may be particularly helpful in situations where the stressor is uncontrollable or cannot be changed'.[100] 'If I started into detail of our engagement, I should disturb the censor and my own rest', writes Wilfred Owen to his mother in October 1918, shortly after returning to the front from Craiglockhart hospital.[101] Equally significant then, is what is selectively silenced, or omitted, from the written page—a self-censorship. In this context, the diary or letter is a rare space of personal freedom, a space where men can construct a less traumatic, if less accurate, war. Combatants can thus turn from the profoundly uncontrollable and indiscriminately brutal spaces of the war's frontlines, to spaces that *can* be controlled—the construction of the dug-out 'home' and the blank page. In these safe spaces, individual agency can once more be asserted, restoring a sense of calm. H.T. Clements, for example, describes his process of crafting a domestic dug-out in his diary:

> I managed to get some sacks from an old house and I covered the side of the dugout […] Later I got some wood and boarded the floor. Our table consists of a small wine cask, with an old window shutter on top. A piece of newspaper serves as a table cloth and on it we have now a large glass jam pot full of flowers. There are two shelves also pegs for overcoats, equipment, etc. […]. In a ruined farm at the back there is a cat with three fine little kittens.[102]

Here the war's fragmentation is reversed. That which had been damaged and broken has been repurposed and made new—a creative task, which requires a subtle form of control. It also presents the diary, at least in this moment, a site of 'refuge', its pages offering, in Lejeune's words, 'a space and time protected from the pressures of life', wherein one—in choosing what to meditate upon—can regain some semblance of agency, of control.[103] Focusing solely on men's depictions of blasted and barren battlefields, Hynes argues that

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[100] Martz, et al., *Trauma Rehabilitation After War and Conflict* (Springer: New York, 2010), p. 255.
[101] Wilfred Owen, letter, 4 October 1918, in Bell, ed., *Wilfred Owen. Selected Letters* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1985) p. 351.
[102] H.T. Clements, diary, 11 June 1916.
[103] Lejeune, 'How Do Diaries End?' *On Diary*, p. 195.

> war turns landscape into anti-landscape, and everything in that landscape into grotesque, broken, useless rubbish—including human limbs. Reading soldier's accounts […] we see with estranged eyes. These lives are nothing like ours, and these places are like nothing we could possibly find in our familiar civilian world.[104]

While depictions of grotesque and broken things are, without question, extremely common, the combatant diary is rarely devoid of familiar things. Indeed, when at rest, men like Clements actively seek to find and draw written connections to home. In doing so, they combat the estrangement and alienation that Hynes—along with Fussell, Leed, and Mosse—position as paramount. Far from 'see[ing] with estranged eyes', surely Clements' description inspires a sense of acute recognition and connection, not only for the combatant, but also for the modern reader. In these moments, men's identities as sons, fathers, and husbands take precedence over that of soldier; 'there is a cat with three fine little kittens', writes Clements—a simple observation, but one undoubtedly rooted in his longing for family. The aim, furthermore, is not simply to craft a space that is functional, but, in some sense, beautiful—'we have now a large glass jam pot full of flowers'.

Writing to his fiancé, Winnie, C.T. Newman similarly describes his frontline 'home' using distinctly domestic terms,

> [S]heets of tin [scrounged] from an R.E. dump for the roof and built up walls from debris […] We have installed our table and chair and made a shelf, on which our 'china' is set out including a cut-glass decanter rescued from rubbish inside a blown up house […] On the table [an] earthenware jar—a one time container of Devonshire Cream, in which are two sunflowers. So you see how cozy we are.[105]

Creativity is the skill most prized here. In carefully selecting and repurposing what the war's violence has made 'useless', he attempts to recreate some form of home. The creation, and depiction, of such domestic spaces allowed combatants to anchor their experiences in their pre-war, domestic lives. As rightly argued by Jessica Meyer, 'in describing their experiences of war in terms of domesticity, these letters [and diaries] indicate the extent to which men were unable to divorce their identities from

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[104] Samuel Hynes, *The Soldier's Tale*, p. 8.
[105] C.T. Newman, letter, 8 September 1917, IWM, Documents. 12494 (03/5/1).

their domestic identities'.[106] In Barlow's words, 'the new hut or tent becomes a sort of representation of home'.[107] The construction and meticulous description of these home spaces, then, are both rituals of social and cultural repair. They reposition the soldier in the midst of the familiar—and intact—domestic space, allowing him to first perform and then document the routines of his pre-war life. They offer and represent, a return of the cultural world, the world which, in Scarry's words, had been made 'weightless' in the face of the war's trauma.[108] If, as cognitive psychologists argue, we must create coherent narratives of the self through time—selectively aligning past, present, and perceived future—then the soldier's construction of such domestic spaces mark a physical attempt to ensure continuity. These constructed domestic spaces, furthermore, allowed men to both inhabit and feel some sense of intactness amid war's absolute destruction—intactness being intimately connected to feelings of safety. Finally, in carefully describing these whole, undamaged spaces in their letters, men seek re-assurance and confirmation, not only of the physical self, but also of the, equally intact, domestic self. 'Subjective composure', argues Graham Dawson, 'fundamentally depends on social recognition', with its power to confirm that the visions of the self and world […] correspond to those of other people'.[109] When the individual is removed from those who know him best—from those most capable of providing such confirmation—the desire for self-assurance is heightened; this desire increases exponentially when the individual is placed under threat. This makes the letter, and the ongoing dialogic nature of its form, particularly vital in war. I will turn now to an examination of the combatant letter as an imaginative, creative space, a space where men maintained connection to their pre-war lives and pre-war selves through the use of both memory and fantasy.

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[106] Jessica Meyer, *Men of War: Masculinity and the First World War in Britain* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 34.
[107] G.R. Barlow, letter, 28 September 1915, IWM, Documents. 2755 (86/40/1).
[108] Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, p. 32.
[109] Graham Dawson, Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 23.

iii. Restorative rituals: Sending touch—the letter as medium for maintaining connection to domestic identities through fantasy and memory

The war's outbreak marked a profound disruption to civilian life. Men's separation from their accustomed comforts and routines, their possible future plans, and their families, was extremely challenging, before many had even crossed the Channel. Writing to her soon-to-be fiancé, Cyril Newman, Winifred Blackburn is already acutely frustrated with the distance between them: Just before he departs for France, she writes, 'I am living without a heart […] I feel most awful about your going'.[110] Once on the front, amid its desolation, its violence, and its monotony, this separation became infinitely more challenging and more stressful for both men on the front and those at home. In this context of prolonged separation—wherein home leave was a rare gift—the letter was a vital medium through which men could maintain romantic relationships. As we have seen, combatants often draw connections to the familiar and safe spaces of home; this imagining allows them to maintain some form of continuation and connection. However, while some conjure the safety of the domestic space, others pen the reverse, drawing mothers, wives, and sisters into their front-line surroundings. Writing in October of 1915, Newman, for example, attempts to align his and Winifred's movements in time; 'I am due to go to the trenches on a mining fatigue. When you are in Chapel I shall be crawling under the ground in dark passages'.[111] In making parallel their (extremely incongruous) activities at a specific moment, he draws a point of connection between their separated lives. In a later letter, he is more vivid in positioning her in his surroundings:

> Were you, Winnie dear, to peep inside you would be struck immediately by a sense of untidiness and disorder. You would see first an inanimate form on the floor—an irregular mass of sandbags, overcoat and leather jerkin. That is my friend and co-tenant Wild—getting—or trying to get in, a six hours sleep before relieving me on the "D3" (telephone). Ranged around the room, the ceiling of which is just high enough to allow one to sit on the floor upright, is an ill-assorted collection of "things"—necessary and unnecessary. (That "tinny" scratching noise is only a mouse having a lick round our mess tin. He's quite harmless), Here is our culinary dept; primus stove, oil bottle, mess-tin, frying pan, plates and mugs; a tin of jam, a tin of condensed milk (not much milk inside however), a

[110] C.T. Newman, letter, 3 May 1915, p. 81.
[111] Ibid., letter, 17 October 1915, p. 180.

> tobacco tin holding sugar, a cigarette tin holding butter. What's that sack there? No—not full of eatables—merely half full of empty maconachie tins, jam tins, tea leaves and other rubbish. [112]

The letter here serves several functions. A venue for both imagination and fantasy, it is likely meant to entertain (and comfort) both writer and recipient. It is telling that while Newman invites his fiancée into the relative safety of his domestic (if disordered) dugout, he does not extend the same invitation to the battlefield—the omission perhaps being an act of protection, not only for Winnie, but also Cyril himself, avoidance and distraction, as we have seen, being tools for sustaining the self in war. In either case, in imaginatively inviting Winnie into his surroundings, Newman temporarily collapses distance and time, thereby creating the illusion of joint-experience, an illusion that also permits some form of continuation of their pre-war life. Newman's description is, in turn, an act of translation and reinterpretation, an attempt to lessen what Mary A. Favret terms the letter's 'epistemological gap'.[113] His bracketed asides provide explanation of military terms—'D3 (telephone)'—and common sounds—'only a mouse'; the greater knowledge of his living conditions he shares, the less isolated he feels within them. The use of humour in the description too holds potential significance for both writer and recipient. In imagining his dug-out from her perspective, Newman is granted a humorous reinterpretation of his potentially bleak and uncomfortable surroundings. His exhausted comrade becomes 'an irregular mass of sandbags', while his meagre cooking supplies and rations become the 'culinary [department]'. Many psychologists cite the use of humour as an effective coping strategy in highly uncontrollable and stressful circumstances.[114] When narrated through the prism of the humorous, or the absurd, danger and discomfort can appear more manageable.

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[112] Ibid., p. 396.
[113] Mary A. Favret, in 'War Correspondence: Reading Romantic War', rightly argues that 'war correspondence constructs the distance between the warriors and their loved ones as an epistemological gap'. *Prose Studies* 19.2 (1996), p. 175.
[114] See, for example, S.M. Labott and R.B. Martin, 'The Stress-moderating Effects of Weeping and Humour', *Journal of Human Stress*, 13.4 (1987).

While Newman imagines his fiancée at the front as an observer—present but physically separate from him—others imaginatively conjure moments of intimacy, the letter being the primary medium for sending 'touch' in war. In these moments, the letter's performative features are paramount. Indeed, they permitted men the opportunity to rehearse, or reprise, their domestic roles as sons, brothers, and husbands through drawing on the tools of fantasy and memory. Writing allows Lance Corporal Walter Williamson, for example, to invoke connection with his wife, whom he has been separated from for two years. In May of 1918, he is comfortably billeted in a small village. After an early morning walk in the gardens, he describes his imagining of his wife's touch in a letter:

> Yours was a dear little letter yesterday […] As I went through the gardens a few minutes since, a little leaf with the dew on just drew itself across my lips, oh so cool and sweet, just like your lips in your quiet moods. Just like you sitting up in bed early one morning, shaking your hair back and giving me one of those brushing kisses and saying "Oh lad what a glorious morning it is." This is just the sort of morning that you would say "Just let us have a look down the garden before we have breakfast" and argue that your slippers were quite waterproof when they were not.[115]

Intimacy is here created though the evocation (and memory) of tender contact. Though his drawing specifically on sensually descriptive words—'lips', 'cool', 'sweet', 'brushing'—Corporal Williamson recreates the *feel* of the remembered moment. In the absence of home leave, the letter becomes a vital conduit for such echoes of touch. In her essay, 'The Epistolarium: On Theorizing Letters and Correspondences', Liz Stanley rightly argues that letters, are 'strongly metonymic of the *particular* writer, being a kind of proxy for them'.[116] They involve 'a simulacrum of presence by standing for or conjuring up the writer'.[117] It is thus not only the carefully drawn details of Williamson's remembrance that conjure him for his fiancée, but also the trace of his hand in the form of his script, his characteristic turns of phrase, his errors. Furthermore, as the letter is a dialogical

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[115] Lance Corporal Walter Williamson, letter, 21 May 1918 cited in Mandy Kirkby, ed., *Love Letters of the Great War* (Basingstoke and Oxford: Macmillan, 2014), pp. 68-69.
[116] Liz Stanley, 'The Epistolarium: On Theorizing Letters and Correspondences', *Auto/Biography* 12 (2004), p. 209.
[117] Ibid., p. 209.

exchange, Williamson knows that his return to the role of husband and lover in the letter's pages is likely to be confirmed; his fiancée will perhaps contribute to his conjuring of this shared moment, her letter containing its own 'referential signals'. The personal significance of these 'signals' were heightened, to say the least, in war.[118] Indeed, they were a primary medium and mechanism for continued intimacy, for reciprocal touch.

Such letters also functioned in distancing the combatant writer from the war's violence, isolation, and monotony. Indeed, they allowed men like Williamson a temporary escape, returning them to past moments of domestic bliss. As Mary A. Favret argues, 'The immediate privations of military living only inflate the pleasures of home and homeland'.[119] As we saw in Chapter Two, both soldiers and those at home contributed to these idealized imaginings. Indeed, at times, letter writers on both home and battlefront actively avoided discussion of domestic conflicts and arguments—this being a form of protection. Indeed, centring only on ideal images of the home front allowed men like Private Eric Appleby to carefully conjure the details of what he calls a 'perfect' future day in a love letter:

> And now for our evening. Well, first we would get ready for dinner, and you would put on—what?—that sweet grey dress with the sticky-up Elizabethan collar. Then we'd have a nice dinner all to ourselves, and afterwards, when everything was cleared away and the curtains drawn and the chairs close to the fire, then we'd put out the lamp and make a good blaze. You'd kneel down and poke away at the fire till it blazed up. Then you would perhaps take your knitting, while I would gaze into the fire and think of how wonderful it was in 'heaven and earth' away from all this horribleness. Then you would have got tired of sitting curled up, and I would put my arms around you and lift you towards me. Then I would draw your head back ever so gently until you looked full up into my face as I bent down. Then a wonderful love quiver would run through me and I would bend down further and kiss you full on the lips. I can almost see those dear hands holding the knitting drop to your lap when I took your head in my hands, and I can feel the wonderful thrill of real love go through me as my lips touch yours. The minutes would slip away and the hours would fly, and still we would forget the time. What would it matter.[120]

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[118] Ibid., p. 209.
[119] Mary A. Favret, p. 174.
[120] Private Eric Appleby, letter, 17 October 1916, *Love Letters of the Great War*, pp. 88-89.

In this letter, candid and intimate, Private Appleby temporarily inhabits the role of lover. Separated from his sweetheart for many months, its description—written as a moment-by-moment progression towards 'the wonderful thrill'—serves as a substitute for physical intimacy. Drawing on the letter's performative characteristics, he dramatizes the future scene, complete with 'costume'—'that sweet grey dress with the sticky-up Elizabethan collar—and stage direction—'you'd kneel down', 'I would put my arms around you'. Such exacting details make clear their writer's full imaginative presence in this future moment of safety and intimacy. Indeed, for the time being, Private Appleby can 'forget all about [the] beastliness' that physically surrounds him.[121] Such letters present a powerful counter to the feelings of anger and estrangement toward women cited by some more literary writers. 'You love us when we're heroes, home on leave, / Or wounded in a mentionable place./ You worship decorations; you believe / that chivalry redeems the war's disgrace', writes Siegfried Sassoon in 'Glory of Women'.[122] Citing Siegfried Sassoon's bitterly ironic poem, Susan Kingsley Kent argues that the war became a 'sex war', as soldiers saw women as benefiting from their absence, thereby emasculating them.[123] And yet, as we have seen, the letters of 'ordinary' combatant fathers, husbands, and sons reveal emotions far beyond those of anger. In the words of Arthur Hamilton Gibbs, '[l]etters came, filled with all the delicious everyday of another world, filling one's brain with a scent of verbena and briar rose, like the cool touch of a woman's hands on the forehead of a man in delirium'.[124] In their written responses to such welcomed letters, men temporarily re-inhabited their domestic roles. Pre-war interests, spaces, and desires are brought back to the fore as men seek to maintain connection to their home front lives, and home front identities.

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121 Ibid., p. 87.
122 Siegfried Sassoon, 'Glory to Women', *Counter-Attack and Other Poems* (London: William Heinemann, 1918)
123 Susan Kingsley Kent, *Making Peace: The Reconstruction of Gender in Interwar Britain* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1993), pp. 44-45.
124 Gibbs, *The Grey Wave*, p. 149.

Such connections, however, are not always so easily drawn. Indeed, for some men, prolonged exposure to the war's terrors made home, and their civilian identities—as son, husband, father—seem ever more remote. In these moments, many young men sought emotional support from family, and, in particular, from their mothers. I will turn now to an examination of the letter's role in allowing men to maintain connection to their domestic roles as sons—a relationship that was vital, as Michael Roper has argued, to many men's mental and emotional survival. It was, as we shall see, a venue for both protection and cathartic divestment. It was also a place where some form of consistency with men's pre-war lives and interests could be maintained.

iv. Restorative rituals: 'I could cry…I have had to cry': letters to mothers and expressions of fear, shame, and sorrow[125]

'Mother dear I was in an awful state, I hope you won't mind me mentioning this to you', writes Cecil Stockbridge in 1 November 1915; he was eighteen when he enlisted in 1914.[126] In writing to their mothers, soldiers like Stockbridge were able to reconnect to their identities as sons, this made it possible for them to continue the relationship from which they received vital emotional support. The Imperial War Museum's diverse collection of letters written to mothers makes clear the significance of this relationship. Young men, in particular, relied heavily on the support and encouragement they received from mothers as caretakers, and as sympathetic listeners. Indeed, while many men, including Stockbridge, softened the war's realities when writing to young sisters and grandmothers, they regularly expressed fear and frustration to their mothers; they also confessed feelings of shame and self-doubt, and described, in detail, the violence and destruction that they had seen and experienced. Stockbridge, for example, writes to his mother:

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[125] D.J. Sweeney, letter, IWM, Documents. 7397 (76/226/1).
[126] C. Stockbridge, letter, 1 November 1915, IWM, Documents. 15796 (07/41/1).

> In reserve we couldn't get any water. After being in reserve for three days, we again went up to the firing line. […]. The Germans would shell us and all we could do was to chance to luck. Now one day a shell burst quite near to our trench. Now it is instinct to duck and try to protect your head. I did so, and first of all a piece of lead landed on my back and for a few seconds I thought I was wounded, but, worst luck, it was a spent piece of shrapnel. You will be surprised to hear me say "worst luck", so really Mother dear, I get so "fed up" sometimes, that I wish I could get to England even wounded.[127]

Stockbridge here frankly recounts a near-death experience; he also admits to wanting to be wounded, if it will return him to England. It is telling that similar admissions are not present in letters written to other family members; it seems that in reclaiming his role as son, he can temporarily relinquish some of the more rigid demands of his identity as soldier—stoicism, selflessness, composure. In *The Secret Battle*, Michael Roper draws on psychoanalyst Wilfred Bion's theories in arguing that mothers were often responsible for hearing and containing the emotional experiences of their adolescent soldier sons.[128] This role, facilitated by the letter, appears to have be vital to many men. Indeed, even those who were clearly anxious about worrying their mothers, nonetheless felt compelled to relieve at least some of their emotional burden through expression, confession, and cathartic release; 'I hope you don't mind me mentioning this to you', writes Stockbridge.[129]

Other men, anxious about their ability to adequately perform their role as soldier, turned to their mothers to confess fears and potentially mitigate anxiety. Shortly after his promotion to Officer, E.K. Smith is anxious about his performance in front of his men. In August 1915, he writes to his mother:

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[127] Ibid., letter, 1 November 1916.
[128] Michael Roper, *The Secret Battle*, p. 250-254.
[129] Stockbridge, letter, 1 November 1916.

> Well, to go into more details—I found my men rather slack, having been in charge of a sergeant for several weeks, so it seemed necessary to face the situation and show them from the outset that it would not do. Accordingly, I delivered a speech in a severe tone which was very largely assumed, had they known it. […] The upshot of all this is that I am getting on well, and hope not to feel quite so much an outsider in relation to the platoon next time we go into action.[130]

While Smith, as Officer, must appear competent, controlled, and self-assured when standing before his men—'assum[ing]' a 'severe tone'—as son, he can admit to the anxieties and insecurities he feels. He can relinquish the militarized facets of his identity, and reclaim his role as son, a role that provides, in this moment, comfort, calm, and reassurance. Indeed, the blank page that began with "Dearest Mother" was undoubtedly among war's safest 'spaces', perhaps instilling feelings of safety and consolation.

v. Restorative rituals: Stepping off the stage—the diary as site for cathartic divestment and release, when performance of public scripts is not possible and identity is threatened

While the letter, as we have seen, often served as a site for men to communicate and navigate feelings of fear and self-consciousness—the maternal audience, in particular, providing a sympathetic ear—there are some experiences that its pages cannot contain. Indeed, whether to protect the recipient, or the soldier himself from increased feelings of shame, the war's most gruesome and most violent sights and experiences are often reserved for the diary's more private pages. In these instances, the war diary becomes, as Thomas Mallon argues, 'a very pliable priest', its promise of secrecy inviting men's 'ritual unburdenings'.[131] In these instances, public scripts must be abandoned or eschewed; they cannot contain the war's horrors. Indeed, the diarist must, in a sense, leave the 'stage'. Rather than seek to reassert, repair, and/or redefine their identity, they must first find some sense of divestment, of release. In his study of 'The Psychophysiology of Confession',

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[130] E.K. Smith, letter, 6 August 1915, *Letters Sent from France: Service with the Artists' Rifles and The Buffs, December 1914 to December 1915* (London: J. Cobb, n.d.).
[131] Thomas Mallon, *A Book of One's Own*, p. 209.

J.W. Pennebaker examined the correlation between confiding traumatic events and one's being able to, at least temporarily, lower the stress placed on the body.[132] He found that while all subjects who had disclosed traumatic events displayed clear signs of relief, the presence of a silent confessor, as opposed to a tape-recorder, inhibited talking.[133] Perhaps the letter's known audience then, silent, but similarly present, inhibits some men's desire, or need, for confession and catharsis. In this context, the diary functions like Pennebaker's 'tape recorder'; as an inanimate object (that can be destroyed) it allows for cathartic divestment without fear of judgment or reprisal. After describing his frantic run into no man's land, as machine guns 'crack[ed] like hell', H.T. Clements writes, 'a fellow near asked me if I'd help him back—he was wounded in the [le]gs. "No" I yelled—"take off your equipment and crawl". It was rotten'.[134] These moments cannot be contained, or explained, using public scripts; indeed, they are in direct opposition to the soldier hero's stoicism and self-sacrifice. In order to find some sense of relief from the resulting shame, and/or sense of failure—as a soldier, a patriot, a man—it seems Clements is compelled to 'confess' and seek some form of absolution. Perhaps in order for some men to maintain connection to their pre-war lives and pre-war identities, the war's most violent and horrific episodes must first be divested and contained, at least to the diary page. In these moments, detailing the traumatic event or scene functions in separating it from the self; its visible transference to the clean blank page allows for the continued coherence of *both* the moral civilian and the stoic soldier. More simply stated, it allowed men, at least for the time being, to 'carry on'. Psychologists of cognitive narrative theory argue that 'the experience of trauma ensues when lived events outpace peoples' abilities to emplot or narrate these events from the perspective of dominant life narratives. The sights, sounds, and smells associated with traumatic events preclude

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[132] James W. Pennebaker, et al., 'The Psychophysiology of Confession: Linking Inhibitory and Psychosomatic Processes', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 54.4 (1987), p. 781.
[133] Ibid., p. 781.
[134] 2nd Lieutenant H.T. Clements, diary, 1 July 1916, IWM., Documents. 3413 (86/76/1).

such emplotment'.[135] The traumatic event thus 'remains as an isolated and unprocessed collection of fragmented memories'.[136]

The diary pages of countless combatant writers reflect this unprocessed, or unassimilated, fragmentation. Unable to attach meaning, or clear value, to a terrifying event—or one's actions in relation to it—men seek temporary relief through the dissociated act of expression. On 20 May 1915, S.H. Sutton writes an uncharacteristically long entry in his diary. After three hours sleep in the reserve lines, he wakes with badly watering eyes and a head 'like wood'—German gas having made its way to the reserve lines as he slept. His unit, nonetheless, spends the day building up the parapet before marching toward the firing line at 1 a.m. At this point in the entry, the collective 'we' and 'us' is replaced by the singular first person, I. Using the diary page as a site of cathartic confession, containment, and release, he writes:

> [I]t was about 3o.c. a.m. when a smell nearly knocked me off my feet & an alarm [g]ong started banging. & this was one of Fritz'[s] Gass[ ] attacks. This time being awake I had sense enough to stick [a] piece of cotton wool into my mouth […] managed to keep firing. I don't know if this was due to the Sergt. Maj[or] or the sight of the Germans coming on, until I was so exhausted with gas that I fe[ll] to the bottom of the trench & cried with rage. I laid there for not more than about 10 minutes when the shout went up they were retiring. this is about the first time I knew what madness was. I jumped up & fired my rifle like a madman & there was hundreds more like me[,] mad for the time being. but the Germans had entered our line on the right where our "C" Coy. Had been forced to retire but had got back again.[137]

Sutton here uses the diary page to contain, and thereby separate from himself, an event that cannot be easily assimilated, neither into his 'dominant life narratives'—be they rooted in morality or rationality, nor using dominant public scripts of soldiering. Indeed, he makes little attempt to attach meaning to his actions, choosing, rather, to equate them with a temporary 'madness', a term which, in itself, separates the man who 'cried with rage' from the man who now writes. It should also be

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[135] Alan E. Stewart and Robert A. Neimeyer, 'Emplotting the Traumatic Self: Narrative Revision and the Construction of Coherence', *The Humanist Psychologist*, 29 (2001), pp. 8-39.
[136] Ibid., 12.
[137] S.H. Sutton, diary, 20 May 1915, IWM. Documents. 15914.

noted that, during the period of rest that follows this event, when he and unit recover from the gas, Sutton writes no entries in his diary for over a week. From here, and through the next month, his entries return to their brief, largely perfunctory, form; 'Still having a Good rest but for occasional shell fire', for example, comprises the entire entry for 2 June. The diary's pages, then, become more significant—more necessary—to their writer when he is under greatest threat, not only physically, but also psychologically: 'this is about the first time I knew what madness was'. The next diary entry that is of similar detail and length, for example, occurs four months later, when he is forced to cross No Man's Land and enter the old German trenches, passing 'Bombs[,] Rifles & ammunition & piles of dead and limbless & all for a Circular Redoubt about 100ft in dia[meter]'.[138] Indeed, in narrating the chaotic and uncontrollable—being gassed and fired upon, while having to remain in place, or confronting the materiality of the body in war, as bombs and limbs are amassed together—Sutton seeks to regain some form of control. The moment's chaos, and his, at times unpredictable, response in relation to it—is contained and given order at least in writing. In this moment, the diary functions, in turn, in providing a form of cathartic release. In committing such terrifying and incomprehensible events to the written, physical page, the writer, in a sense, separates them from himself. In his essay, 'How Do Diaries End?', Philippe Lejeune theorizes the diary as a space of release. 'Putting something down on paper', he writes, means separating it from yourself, purifying and cleansing yourself. […]. The function of expression is dissociated from the function of memory—one can even say it is tied to a function of forgetting. This is the logic of shedding'.[139]

In a similarly uncharacteristically long diary entry, Captain D.H. Pegler provides a graphic depiction of a dead German soldier. Having entered into the depths of the, generally unseen, German trench, he is brought face to face with the enemy. The sheer graphic detail of his written

[138] S.H. Sutton, diary, 20 October 1915, IWM. Documents. 15914.
[139] Philippe Lejeune, 'How Do Diaries End?', p. 194.

testimony suggests a similar desire to divest, or mitigate fear and trauma—the act of describing, once again, grants some form of control and containment. The entry, dated 5 August 1916, states:

> No man's Land…is littered with skeletons whose bleached skulls and bones stick out through their tattered clothing. The old German front line is about nine feet deep, with dug-out[s] some of them twenty feet deep. One of them I entered had thirty five steps down to it, and in it we found 11 German corpses—dead about three weeks, we hastily put on our gas helmets and left as quickly as possible, after a hasty search for documents.
>
> In the right hand of a dead German Officer that we found in a traverse was a live grenade, the arm was outstretched and he had evidently been killed in the act of throwing—he appeared to have been bayoneted in the throat, the rats had taken his left hand and his nose, so that he was not pretty to look at. A field card in his possession was addressed to Karl Meyer and his shoulder strap bore the number 22.[140]

There is a marked desire here to detail, and therefore in some sense contain or give order to an experience that threatens subjectivity. Captain Pegler's focus on this particular soldier—of the eleven found in the trench—is significant. The enemy here is dead, and yet he is positioned as though still living: 'killed in the act of throwing'. Life and death are therefore confused in a terrifying moment of indifferentiation. This deeply unsettling experience of ambiguity is extremely common in men's frontline writing. In Coningsby Dawson's words: 'It is horribly difficult sometimes to distinguish between the living and the slaughtered'.[141] The uncanny position of the body also makes abundantly clear the nature of death in modern, mechanized war; it is random, indiscriminate, and incredibly undignified. In the face of this unpredictability, men are often forced into a passive, unknowing position; their fate is determined not by personal acts, but by chance. Even a moment of action, of control—the throwing of a grenade—can be unexpectedly halted, and rendered irrelevant, by death. Men are therefore stripped of control of even their most basic instinctual desire to protect themselves.[142] Confronted, literally face-to-face, with this terrifying reality, Captain Pegler seeks the

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[140] Captain D.H. Pegler, diary, IWM, Documents. 4357 (82/7/1).
[141] Dawson, letter, date, *Khaki Courage*, p. 62.
[142]It is also telling that the text reveals no anger or hostility toward the enemy. Indeed, in its detachment, the passage suggests feelings of pity. There is no expression of triumph at having captured the trench. The German is not described as the 'enemy', but as a dead soldier, a dead *man*. In the context of a war that is characterized by brutal and random death, his fate could very easily have been Pegler's. This knowledge is present in the passage's quiet, descriptive tone.

restoration of control, of order. In this context, his final mention of common military identifiers—the field card and shoulder number—signifies a desire to restore some sense of coherent identity to an otherwise deeply unsettling and ambivalent corpse. Perhaps in doing so, he, in turn, secures his own fragile sense of identity—as soldier, as human. In such moments of acute terror and horror, moments that are difficult, if not impossible, to assimilate into what cognitive psychologists term one's 'dominant life narratives', men turn to the diary page for divestment and release. In doing so, their identities—both civilian and military—are symbolically separated, at least for the time being, from that which poses a potent threat to subjectivity.

Conclusions

This chapter has examined combatant diaries and letters as tools for the maintenance, repair, and reclamation of men's domestic identities in war. In the midst of the First World War's chaos—its unpredictability, its violence, its dirt, and its death—the clean blank page offers refuge. It is a safe space where some sense of control can be asserted through narrative. While the letter offers the repeated reprisal of men's domestic roles as sons, husbands, fathers, and brothers, providing a temporary sense of continuity and normalcy, the diary's more private page invites candid expressions of fear, horror, and shame—an act of self-protection and cathartic release. However, life-writing's arguably most important function in war is found not in its inherent tie to life, but to death. Indeed, the soldier's epistolarium and his private diary can each serve as a form of identity-preservation, of permanence. As tangible objects, the safe return of these texts to the home front can often be assured, even if their writer's return cannot. In his essay 'Writing While Walking', Philippe Lejeune writes of the diary's ability to connect, if only for a moment, the transient to the eternal, a

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The German soldier's body then, signifies a breakdown of not only the boundary between life and death, but also between friend and foe.

connection symbolized—and fleetingly felt—by the diarist's seemingly simple inscription of the day's date. In his words, 'the pleasure of dating consists of being hooked into a little bit of eternity when you write the date, making the fugitive and the eternal coincide with that inscription, and on the other hand of "passing the current along" making it possible to transmit the here and now into the future'.[143] The desire for, and significance of, this connection to eternity, to permanence, is perhaps never more keenly felt than in war. Indeed, the dated letter and/or diary entry offer the frontline soldier some form of self-preservation, of survival. While death, for Lejeune's diarists, is an elusive and unknowable spectre, for the combatant writer it is infinitely more present, more raw, and more real. Indeed, its constant presence on the front charges the written page—it sharpens detail and heightens emotions; it makes expression and the attribution of meaning and value infinitely more important. It also, in turn, makes the tangible form of the diary and letter page, in themselves, more precious. As simulacra of their writer, they can conjure his presence, even long after his death—a fact many combatants were intimately aware of. Writing in June 1916, a mere fortnight before his death, Captain May writes the following message of farewell to Maude in his diary:

> 'My darling, *au revoir*, it may well be that you will only have to read these lines as ones of passing interest. On the other hand, they may well be my last message to you. If they are, know through all my life that I loved you and baby with all my heart and soul […]. I pray God I may do my duty, for I know, whatever that may entail, you would <u>not have it otherwise</u>.[144]

Positioned somewhere between determination and resignation, fear and hope, past and present, the diary here provides comfort and consolation to its writer, and, undoubtedly to its imagined future reader. More significant, however, is that it allows Captain May a form of control that will reverberate. In committing his farewell to the written page, he makes clear (and permanent) the

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[143] Philippe Lejeune, 'Writing While Walking', p. 124.
[144] Charles May, *To Fight Alongside Friends: The First World War Diaries of Charlie May*, ed. by Gerry Harrison (London: Harper Collins, 2014), p. 204. Underlined three times in original.

version of himself that he most desires to be remembered, to be, in Lejeune's words, 'eternal'—a self that is *both* dutiful soldier and devoted husband, both martial and domestic.

CHAPTER FOUR

'THEY ALL DIE BRAVE': NARRATING, NAVIGATING, AND CONTAINING TRAUMA ON THE HOSPITAL FLOOR—THE NURSE'S DIARY AND THE PROTECTION, AND REPEATED REASSERTION, OF THE PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY[1]

'[W]ith tourniquet or hand, in every ordinary case, you will be able,
if you keep your head, to cope with the bleeding till the doctor comes'.

Joseph Bell, *Notes on Surgery for Nurses*, 1887[2]

'[A]n ideal nurse has the very rare instinct of self-forgetfulness. […]
her senses wait on him first and herself afterwards'.

H.C. O'Neill and Edith A. Barnett, *Our Nurses*, 1888[3]

'Have nearly come to end of this [diary]. Must begin a new one'.

Nurse Dorothea Crewdson, diary, 1 October 1915[4]

In April 1915, Casualty Clearing Station No. 3 is positioned just behind the front lines in Poperinghe, near Ypres. Having found temporary shelter in two convents and a seminary, the unit is caught in the midst of heavy bombardment before being evacuated.[5] In order to cope with the mounting causalities—both soldier and civilian—the medical staff works between fifteen and twenty hours a day. At times, even the air of the operating theatre is 'thick with red dust, bits and smoke', as explosions creep ever closer to the hospital's walls.[6] At the end of a particularly frantic shift, one of the unit's theatre nurses, Sister Edith Appleton, writes the following passage in her diary:

> April 20
>
> A frantic day from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m.—one long rush of badly wounded being admitted, and three trainloads have been evacuated. It is a wicked war. Officers and men come in—many so blown to bits that they just come in to die. Most go straight to the theatre for amputation of limb or limbs, or to have their insides—which have been blown out—replaced, and to be made a little more comfortable for the few hours left to them. The big ward is all agonized groans and pleadings and we feel we don't know where to start on the hundreds of things to be done at once. Ypres is very much ruined and heaps of dead—English, French and Belgian—are lying about in the square and all

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[1] Sister Edith Appleton, diary, 16 May 1915, *A Nurse at the Front: The Great War Diaries of Sister Edith Appleton*, ed. by Ruth Cowen (London and New York: Simon and Schuster, 2012), p. 33.
[2] Joseph Bell, *Notes on Surgery for Nurses* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1887), p. 78.
[3] H.C. O'Neill and Edith A. Barnett, *Our Nurses and the Work They Have to Do* (London: Ward, Lock & Co., 1888), p. 17.
[4] Dorothea Crewdson, diary, 1 October 1915, *Dorothea's War: A First World War Nurse Tells Her Story* (London: Phoenix, 2014), p. 51.
[5] Ibid., Introduction, p. 9.
[6] Ibid., diary, 28 April 1915, p. 26.

> around the town. We hear the Germans have given up the hopes of taking Ypres, so have decided to utterly destroy it.[7]

Candid and startling, the diary's pages here offer the traumatized nurse a private venue for mitigation, divestment, and catharsis. Exhausted and enraged, Nurse Appleton can—or perhaps must—temporarily relinquish her professional veneer. The unembellished and emotionless style of the diary's previous entries is abandoned, as its writer, in this moment, requires, not containment or dissociated protection, but release. 'This is the logic of shedding', writes Philippe Lejeune.[8] In unburdening oneself—in confession, in fear, in grief, in rage—the individual is temporarily relieved, or liberated, from the weight of the emotional burden.[9] It is, in a sense, an act of transference; in committing the traumatic event to the blank page, the writer physically separates it from her/himself. An alternate, and similarly self-sustaining, task of attributing *meaning* to men's suffering through narrative will come later in the diary. Indeed, once Sister Appleton has been granted rest, the men she nurses will once more become individuals in description; they will be called 'good' and 'brave', their personal stories will be transcribed, and their words of thanks will be carefully quoted– each of these being small assertions of meaning and value for the writer and her role as healer. In this instance, however, Nurse Appleton is still psychically present inside the moment of fear, horror, and grief, a moment when the hospital floor is no longer a sterile place of prone men—whose wounds can be readily assessed and controlled by her trained hands—but a butcher shop, a place of 'bits' and 'limbs' and a cacophony of agonized sounds that threaten to overwhelm— 'we don't know where to start', she writes. This '*we'* too is telling. The more self-assured, self-declarative pronoun 'I'

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[7] Ibid., diary, 20 April 1915, p. 24.
[8] Philippe Lejeune, 'How Do Diaries End?' *On Diary*, ed. by Jeremy D. Popkin and Julie Rak (Manoa: U of Hawaii P, 2009), p. 194. The notion of 'purging' or 'discharging' of strong emotions, and its resultant relief and/or reduction in 'neurotic symptoms', has a long history in psychotherapy, beginning with Sigmund Freud and Joseph Breuer in 1895/1966. Debra Kaminer, 'Healing Processes in Trauma Narratives: A Review', *South African Journal of Psychology* 36.3 (2006), p. 484.
[9] Ibid., p. 194.

will also return later in the diary, in moments where control—along with meaning and purpose—are restored to the diarist; 'I was like a mother to him', she writes of a patient in late May.[10]

Drawing on a diverse collection of both published and unpublished texts written between 1914 and 1918, this chapter will examine the form and function of the First World War nurse's diary. It will consider how these professional women navigated their dual role as witness and healer, a role that was particularly fraught, as feelings of fear, exhaustion, exaltation, pride, and guilt often intermingled. In particular, it will highlight the diary's function as a tool in the maintenance of the nurse's sense of professional identity, an identity that was increasingly troubled by her paradoxical role in war. Her skills allowed her to repair the damaged bodies and minds of men so that they could return them not to safety, but to the front, possibly to die. This is the 'conspiracy' to which Mary Borden refers in *The Forbidden Zone*; '[j]ust as you send your clothes to the laundry and mend them when they come back, so we send our men to the trenches and mend them when they come back again […] just as long as they will stand it'.[11] Even death, in this context, is complicated for the nurse, being constantly battled against, but also, at times, ardently desired. Indeed, in the face of a patient's slow and agonizing decline, death, 'the Angel, the peacemaker', is the only thing that can 'drive[] [p]ain away'.[12] In the midst of the hospital's chaos, furthermore, it was vital that medical staff—both women and men—remain calm, efficient, and steadfast. 'A [nurse] who sees one patient after another arriving […] exhibits an amount of self-control which may well command our admiration', writes Eva Luckes, in the fourth edition to her 1912 handbook, *Hospital Sisters and Their Duties*.[13] Personal feelings, emotions, and discomforts had to be stifled and/or contained in the face of men's often extreme suffering and pain. 'We are understaffed again. However, we won't cry out

[10] Sister Edith Appleton, diary, 21 May 1915, p. 34.
[11] Mary Borden, 'Conspiracy', *The Forbidden Zone* (London: Hesperus Press, 2008), p. 79.
[12] Ibid., 'Moonlight', p. 40.
[13] Eva C.E. Luckes, *Hospital Sisters and Their Duties*, 4th edition (London: The Scientific Press, 1912), pp. 150-151.

till we are hurt', writes Nurse Appleton in March 1915.[14] This professional demand for stoicism, compounded by the war's popular images of the nurse as self-sacrificial heroine, only strengthened the assumption that she was somehow invulnerable to trauma. As asserted by Santanu Das, 'neither soldier nor civilian, she is not granted a place even in this medical 'no man's land'. Entrusted with the repair of minds and bodies the war has ravaged, she is thought to be immune to war trauma'.[15]

This assumption, internalized by the frontline nurse, only rendered the private diary more significant. In the midst of the hospital's chaos, its frantic pace, its gruesome sites, its blood and its death, the blank page could offer a place of freedom and refuge. It was space where concerns for, or of, *the self* could be expressed and navigated—this, in an environment that demanded constant self-sacrifice, both physical and emotional, as the needs of the patient must take precedence. '[T]he life of a diary', argues Steven Kagle, 'is often born of tension, a disequilibrium in the life of its author, which needs to be resolved or held in check'.[16] This is not to suggest that what was committed to the diary page was always fully assimilated or clearly articulated. Indeed, as is extremely common of other forms of trauma writing, it was not, nor, according to trauma theorists like Cathy Caruth, could it be. '[P]atients going out & coming in daily. Altogether a fearful muddle', writes one overwhelmed nurse in 1914.[17] The diary's function in these moments of fragmented and often detached description differs greatly from those written during moments of calm and repose. Indeed, the diary's form—along with the 'form' of identity it presents and/or aids in re-asserting—is intimately connected to the time, space, and conditions of its writing. These various and often overlapping functions will be considered here, as will the diary's silences and omissions. Not unlike the soldier's diary, the nurse's too is restrained by both her traumatic environment and censorship.

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[14] Ibid., diary. 17 March 1915, p. 115.
[15] Santanu Das, *Touch and Intimacy in First World War Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005), p. 195.
[16] Steven E. Kagle, *American Diary Literature, 1620-1799* (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1979), p. 17.
[17] Miss M.B. Nurse Peterkin, diary, 1 December 1914, IWM. Documents. 7058 (77/60/1).

Mary Borden speaks to the inability to communicate traumatic experience in the preface to her memoir *The Forbidden Zone*: 'I have blurred the bare horror of facts and softened the reality in spite of myself, not because I wished to do so, but because I was incapable of a nearer approach to the truth'.[18] This 'incapability', also present in diaries and letters, demands a 'reading between the lines', as does the self-censorship to which the nurse was particularly prone. As repeated witness to the profound pain and suffering of broken men, she—comparatively safe, strong, and whole—often denied any personal feelings, discomforts, or fears as a result of both empathy and guilt. This, in part, accounts for her diary's persistent external focus on the combatant men under her care—their wounds, their stories, their deaths. Writing, in these moments, is a tool for navigation, as well as an act of remembrance and penance, each of which aided in repairing and reasserting the nurse's sense of professional worth and value.

In its simplest purpose, however, the diary could act as a kind of companion for the frontline nurse. The habitual practice of committing one's immediate feelings or surroundings to the written page often aided in keeping the night nurse awake, for example. '1.20 a.m. Feel I am getting very sleepy and leaden eyed', writes nurse Dorothea Crewdson, '[w]ould be a serious matter if I dropped off while sitting here on guard, so I must pull myself together'.[19] For many others, its functions were multifaceted. Narration, as we have seen in the diaries and letters of combatants, offers some semblance of control though its demand for selection and the ordering of events. It demands, in other words, what cognitive psychologist Michelle Crossley refers to as a 'plot'.[20] It also allows for meaning to be sought and reasserted; 'narratives about deviations from the ordinary need to contain reasons, to answer the question *why*?', writes Debra Kaminer.[21] The repeated re-telling,

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[18] Mary Borden, Preface, *The Forbidden Zone* (1929; London: Hesperus Press, 2008), p. 3.
[19] Dorothea Crewdson, diary, 15-16 September 1915, p. 44.
[20] Michele Crossley, *Introducing Narrative Psychology: Self, Trauma, and the Construction of Meaning* (Open UP, 2000).
[21] Debra Kaminer, 'Healing Processes in Trauma Narratives: A Review', *South African Journal of Psychology* 36.3 (2006), p. 489.

and ordering of traumatic experience is significant, furthermore, in its allowing of the individual to 'habituat[e] anxiety through exposure'.[22] In the context of war, the diary, through its flexible form and repeated offering of new beginnings (by virtue of its dated pages), provides the necessary safe space, wherein one's fearful memories can be re-told, potentially 'habituating the survivor to trauma-related anxiety'.[23]

At other moments, as we have seen, the diary offered a safe space for cathartic divestment and release, a space where the stoic and controlled demeanour of the medical professional could be temporarily relinquished, a space where the nurse could vent and/or confess fears and frustrations. The resulting sense of release could better enable the nurse to 'carry on'. 'I feel I shall burst if I don't say what is truly unkind […]', begins Nurse Appleton's entry for 30 January 1916.[24] In these instances, the diary's internalized addressee allows it to become a kind of emotional repository, a private container, safely housing that which the professional nurse must outwardly repress or stifle, in order to nurse.

This is not to suggest, however, that the nurse's every moment was frantic and gruesome. Indeed, her hands held and controlled not only horrific wounds, but also more everyday objects—flowers, a cold cloth, a cup of tea—which too are frequently, and meticulously, described in her diary. Here, her personal writing alters in function. When granted rest, and in turn, greater time to write and self-reflect, the diary often centres on narratives of the writer's gradual reconnection to, or restoration of, the quotidian. While the peacetime diary is, generally speaking, focused on the 'everyday'—diaries being generally understood to be inscriptions of the simple elements and incidents of daily life—here the transcription of the mundane task or event takes on greater significance by virtue of its taking place within the context of the war's chaotic unpredictability and

[22] Ibid., p. 186.
[23] Ibid., 487.
[24] Appleton, diary, 30 January 1916, p. 100.

danger, not to mention its *threat* to daily life. The peacetime diary's inclusive nature, granting equal privilege to what Rebecca Hogan refers to as 'the amazing' and 'the ordinary', is frequently challenged in the war diary, where the simple, quotidian moment is granted heightened, rarefied significance.[25] Indeed, its transcription too is charged, though in a different way from that of the traumatic scene. In this context, the frontline nurse's careful depiction of a simple, 'normal' task, or beautiful scene, can have a restorative, calming effect. Transcription can function as distraction or meditation. It can allow for some sense of connection to, and continuance of, the pre-war life and pre-war self. These brief, if limited, 'escapes' from the hospital's warzone could provide a sense of restorative calm, however limited, allowing the nurse to return to her professional duties.

Furthermore, when the seemingly small, 'everyday' task or moment is described in relation to the men under her care, the narrative functions in reasserting value to her role as healer. The nurse is charged not only with tending to the wounds of men, but also, on another level, with restoring them to the social and cultural world, the world that has, in Elaine Scarry's words, been made 'weightless' in the face of extreme pain and the nearness of death.[26] In facilitating the restoration of their individuality, the nurse, in turn, retrieves her own from the sense of automation, of numbness that the hospital's horrors both cause and make necessary. The diary's pages, in other words, reflect a complex cycle, a constant search for balance, and a repeated re-assertion of the professional, individual, nursing self. 'On the other side of the picture', writes nurse Luard, 'there are many glorious "resurrections"'.[27]

Finally, and perhaps most poignantly, the diary offers the frontline nurse a place to mourn, a place to privately revolt against the war's anonymity and mass death. In these moments, the diary becomes a kind of elegy, one that restores the dignity—and masculinity—of the broken men under

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[25] Rebecca Hogan, 'Engendered Autobiographies: The Diary as a Feminine Form', *Prose Studies* 14.2 (1991), p. 103.
[26] Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford UP, 1985), p. 31-32.
[27] Sister K.E. Luard, diary, 14 April 1917, p. 319.

her care. '[W]hat nobler death could one wish for[,] "For King and Country"', writes Miss Mary Notley in March 1918.[28] This reaffirmation of positive meaning also restores the nurse's sense of professional value. In narrating death through traditional conventions of courageous self-sacrifice and heroic endurance, the nurse, in turn, reasserts the importance of her own role as healer. In these moments, when the language of dominant public scripts re-enters the diary, the complexities and tensions of the nurse's identity in war become clear. Her frontline diary, in short, like that of the soldier's, is a potential tool and coping mechanism. The freedom of expression it provides through its 'wide-ranging yet patterned' form, allows for its immediate adaptation to suit different moods and different needs—this adaptability being vital in an environment that, like the battlefront, is unpredictable, cycling from frantic and horrific to monotonous and sterile.[29] Restoring a sense of control, its pages both reveal and facilitate the creation of narratives not only of disillusion and breakdown, but also of endurance and resilience. Before turning to a detailed analysis of how the war diary functions in repairing and maintaining the frontline nurse's sense of professional identity, I will first outline the nurse's representation in prominent popular discourse, along with the language and fundamental principles of her training. The language and imagery of both of these discourses—public and professional—contributed to the content and form of her diary, in addition to the identity it expresses, shapes, and shields.

I. 'The Roses of No Man's Land': The nurse, public scripts, and professional training[30]

The nurse occupied a complex subject position in the midst of public discourse. Her role was frequently represented by recruitment propaganda as natural for women in wartime—it effectively

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[28] Miss M.C.D. Notley, diary, 22 March 1918, IWM., Documents. 15305 (06/100/1).
[29] Suzanne L. Bunkers and Cynthia A. Huff, eds., *Inscribing the Diary: Critical Essays on Women's Diaries* (Boston: The U of Massachusetts P, 1997), p. 1.
[30] 'The Roses of No Man's Land' is a First World War song. IWM., Department of Sound, 24558. Track 9.

carried women's peacetime responsibilities of nurturance, life-giving, and self-sacrifice to the battlefront. In other words, the nurse was frequently aligned with the conservative domestic deity—the patriotic mother. This association worked to maintain the nurse's wartime work within a traditional, idealized value system, one that equated feminine duty with maternal self-sacrifice; 'Give generously and wholeheartedly, grudging nothing', wrote Katherine Furse in the letter that was 'to be kept in [the] pocket book' of every Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD) nurse. It also, in turn, elevated the relationship between the nurse and the wounded soldier, the two together became the idealized image of masculine and feminine identity in war. Such romanticized images, of course, conveyed nothing of the role's realities. Indeed, it veiled the truly gruesome, disordered, and, very often, messy nature of war nursing. It should be noted, however, that this rhetoric was predominantly directed at the nation's middle-and-upper-class VADs. Professional nurses were generally older, and infinitely more knowledgeable regarding the realities of nursing. '[I]t is cruel', write H.C. O'Neal and Edith A. Barnett, in their 1889 nursing text, *Our Nurses and the Work They Have to Do*, 'to send a young woman into hospital life without having told her of some of the facts of life with which she must come face to face. Sorrowful and even repulsive though they may be'.[31] Indeed, the trained nurses' greater knowledge, along with their desire to attain public recognition for their profession, arguably made them less prone to internalize propaganda's heightened rhetoric. 'Still, there is the fact that the driver VADs are very young, and probably can't help thinking a molehill a mountain', writes Nurse Appleton in July 1916.[32] Such criticisms, common in nurses' diaries, highlight the tensions that were present between the two groups. In general, the volunteer nurse saw her role as one of patriotic service, rather than work. Her writing, as has been argued by

[31] H.C. O'Neill and Edith A. Barnett, *Our Nurses and the Work They Have to Do* (London: Ward, Lock & Co., 1888), p. 16.
[32] Appleton, 14 July 1916, p. 167.

Janet Watson, reflected the similarly service-minded volunteers of Kitchener's army.[33] VADs were also generally of higher social status than their professional counterparts—even paying for their own uniform and 'kit'—resulting in considerable tensions on hospital wards. '[Matron] thinks we [VADs] should have more responsibility now, but I don't think the Sisters are very pleased', writes Dorothea Crewdson.[34] The professional nurse, in comparison, rigorously trained and highly experienced, generally viewed her work differently. 'Two more deaths today. All going well but the medicals make the nursing rather impossible. One cannot do all one wants for them', writes Nurse Kathleen Mann.[35] While no less patriotic, nurses like Mann often saw the war as offering an opportunity to validate their profession, which had been seeking professional status since the late nineteenth century—many of its primarily middle-class members wanted respect, fair payment, and universal qualifications.[36] This professional desire is clear in how many nurses narrate their experiences of war. 'We all get up early and work late and feel a bit 'done' sometimes, which gives us the satisfaction of feeling that now at least we are giving our full strength to the war', writes Appleton.[37] This pride in the face of struggle is reflective of the war's discourses of sacrifice, but it is also present in the scripts of professional nursing more generally. The *Territorial Force Nursing Service Guide for Members of the Service*, for example, asserted that 'a trained nurse proves her worth' when the hospital is overrun with urgent cases requiring triage.[38] This is not to suggest that the professional nurse was unaffected by the often-romanticized images of propaganda, but rather that she also had other scripts on which to draw in her presentation and navigation of her identity as nurse.

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[33] Janet Watson, *Fighting Different Wars: Experience, Memory, and the First World War in Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004), p. 60.
[34] Dorothea Crewdson, 23 November 1915, p. 68.
[35] Sister Kathleen Mann, diary, 25 August 1915, *Women in the War zone*, p. 220.
[36] Watson, *Fighting Different Wars*, pp. 72, 60.
[37] Appleton, 8 July 1916, p. 163.
[38] *Territorial Force Nursing Service Guide for Members of the Service*, Women's Work Collection, IWM., BRC 25, 2/10. Watson, *Fighting Forces*, p. 77.

Posing a challenge to the nurse's professional desire for recognition were the contradictory gendered narratives surrounding her role, and infiltrating her training. As there were no universal standards for nursing yet established, there were multiple views on what language should be used in describing her work, as well as on what should be central in her training—self-discipline, precision, morality. Florence Nightingale, well-known and pioneering nurse of the Crimean War, for example, was strongly opposed to the professionalization of nursing. Believing that it should be a vocation, not a profession, she feared that the heightened status would compromise standards of care.[39] Her school in London emphasized 'the development of character and of self-discipline with moral training'.[40] By the early 1900s, nursing textbooks, written largely by nurses themselves, emphasized skill and precision, calm and clear-headed stoicism, as well as timing and punctuality, in accordance with medical advances and standards of professionalism. Indeed, training was difficult and admission into programs at large voluntary hospitals was highly competitive.[41] Programs were generally three years, during which probationers were overseen by senior nursing Sisters or hospital Matrons. During this time, nurses were trained not only in medicine and medical procedure, but in appropriate behaviour—dress, manner, and interaction with patients. Here the nurse's paradoxical position amid contradictory narratives becomes particularly apparent. While nursing was generally considered an appropriate role for women, involving caretaking, self-sacrifice, and various 'domestic' duties, it also challenged dominant conceptions, being highly skilled, paid labour. 'I do not wish for one moment to exalt hospital life at the expense of family life', assures Eva Luckes in *Hospital Sisters and their Duties,* '[o]n the contrary, I am desirous of showing the necessity for imparting all the sweetest home virtues into it'.[42] Nursing work also involved close contact with male bodies. The

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[39] Monica Baly, *Florence Nightingale and the Nursing Legacy* (London: Croom Helm, 1986), p. 199.
[40] Ibid., p. 25.
[41] Watson, *Fighting Different Wars*, p. 74.
[42] Eva C.E. Luckes, *Hospital Sisters and Their Duties*, 4th edition (London: The Scientific Press, 1912), p. 3.

tension and anxiety this engendered is clear in the uniform itself, as well as in training practices. As argued by Janet Watson, '[a]ll sexuality, of course, had to be repressed. Not only were ankles hidden, but the nurse's capelet was designed to disguise the curves of her breasts'.[43] Not permitted to interact with male patients in the hospital grounds, her propriety was of concern. Even talking with patients was discouraged, as it could distract from other, more important, professional duties. It was from a paradoxical position, then, that nurses had to both protect and advance their professional status. This process required that women walk a fine line. Nursing both provided validation—being a 'natural' choice for women in its focus on the 'taking care' of others—but it also required denial and repression, as both intimacy and sexuality needed to be minimized or repressed in order for them to be perceived as professionals. The nurse's complex subject position, along with the inevitable tensions and anxieties it created, is present on the diary page, as women sought to navigate and understand their relationships and interactions with their patients in the context of war—a context that, at times, demanded the breakdown and/or reconceptualization of standards of both professionalism and care. This, in turn, demanded reconceptualization and re-assertion of the nurse's sense of her own professional identity.

Indeed, the nurse on the front was charged with mending not only the physical but also the emotional wounds of men. In the absence of family, friends, and comrades, hospitalized combatants —whether in the various stages of healing, or dying—often turned to the nurse. She was frequently a compassionate audience to their stories of war, as well as to their confessions of fear, anxiety, and longing, all of which frequently took place amid the heightened emotion and stress of impending death. As we shall see, this environment demanded that she be not simply a nurse, but, at times, also a mother, wife, and friend. Before turning to a detailed analysis of the various functions of the

[43] Watson, *Fighting Different Wars*, p. 74.

nurse's diary, it is useful, at this point, to first consider some aspects of her medical training, in particular those relating to the handling—and description—of both illness and wounds.

i. Illness narratives and the nurse's professional training

I will here briefly consider the language and nature of the nurse's instruction, both illness/injury narratives and in emergency situations, which demanded not only skill and precision, but also a calm and detached demeanour. These aspects of her professional training undoubtedly influenced not only how the war nurse perceived her role, but also the particular language and form of her written representation in war. Her extensive training in both of these areas, furthermore, made her infinitely more aware of the war hospital's realities than the members of the VAD, and, in turn, less prone to internalize the romanticization and idealization of popular rhetoric.

Narrative was—and remains—a fundamental part of medical instruction and practice. In *Doctor's Stories*, Kathryn Hunter highlights how, from the earliest days of medical training, doctors are taught to use narrative in order to interpret, understand, and record the 'story' of their patient's illness and/or recovery, or death.[44]

> Medicine is fundamentally narrative […] and its daily practice is filled with stories […] Much of the central business of caring for patients is transacted by means of narrative […] Medical stories are a well established way of sorting through and tackling problems of diagnosis and treatment […] In such a scientific discipline it is surprising to find this unexpectedly familiar way of making sense of facts.[45]

The nurse too is trained in this form of illness narrative. Stories function in coherently ordering, explaining, and thereby permitting understanding of the patient's illness or injury, along with its course of treatment. An economy of language is most valued here, as efficiency, accuracy, and time are paramount in emergency situations. '*How* to observe as well as what to observe, and how to convey the result of her observations to the Doctor in concise language […] is a matter worthy of

[44] Kathryn Hunter, *Doctor's Stories* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1991), p. 5.
[45] Ibid., p. 5.

much painstaking on the part of the Sister', advises Matron Eva C.E. Luckes, in her 1912 handbook.[46] In their book, which seeks to highlight the 'great general principles underli[ng] all the formulae of [nursing] practice', O'Neill and Barnett, similarly write that '[f]ew people can carry a message exactly as it is given, weight and measure with absolute precision, remember figures or times without a shade of doubt […] Yet all these things are of exceeding importance to the nurse'.[47] This training in highly focused and accurate descriptive narratives of patient illness or injury is found filtered in the war nurse's diary. It accounts, at least in part, for the extremely common presence of succinct, and frequently graphic depictions (if not listings) of combatant wounds. Such depictions, it should be noted are, at times, fundamentally different from those that are written in a similarly direct and graphic language as a result of dissociation, the psychological state and defence mechanism arising out of trauma, which allows the medical professional to continue functioning through emotional detachment. And yet at other moments the two entwine. However, while sometimes challenging to differentiate on the diary page, it is nonetheless important to consider the influence of the nurse's training in medical detachment—and the nature of illness/injury narratives that are essential to it. The diary of nursing sister, K.E Luard, provides an example of this professional distance, along with the pride she takes in it. In April 1917, from Casualty Clearing Station No. 32 in Warlincourt, France, she writes:

> It often happens that no MO can be spared for this tent, so a great deal of responsibility is thrown on to us, and only the Sisters with nerve, experience and sound judgement are any good here.
>
> Once when I was cutting off a split boot of a man wounded in the head, chest, and other thigh, half his foot came off in it—a detail overlooked in the Dressing Hut and the Field Ambulance with all his other injuries.
>
> It has been sunny and windless today, a blessed change, and bright moon tonight. It is all a ghastly business, but they take it without a word and it is grand to see the apparently dying men come to life again.[48]

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[46] Eva C.E. Luckes, *Hospital Sisters and Their Duties*, 4th edition (London: The Scientific Press), p. 164.
[47] H.C. O'Neill and Edith A. Barnett, *Our Nurses and the Work They Have to Do* (London: Ward, Lock & Co., 1989), p. 16.
[48] Luard, diary, 5 April 1917, *Women in the War zone*, p. 318.

This is not the voice of the patriotic volunteer, who writes of 'cheerful heroic Tommies', nor of the traumatized witness. It is, rather the voice of the professional, one who views her role primarily in terms of work—a work whose training had exalted the characteristics of stoicism, nerve, and self-sacrifice long before the war. Indeed, the war's rhetoric had glamourized it, rendering it a clear opportunity for nurses to prove themselves deserving not only of recognition as patriotic self-sacrificing citizens, but also as professionals, who too have 'nerve' and sound 'judgement'.

It should also be noted that Luard's detached and highly detailed language here was one also cultivated by, and through, the nurse's training in emergency situations. Indeed, the nurse, like all medical professionals, was instructed in containing traumatic wounds with speed and precision; this requires an extremely narrow focus on the wound itself. A kind of direct confrontation is demanded in emergency situations; failure to focus one's attention in this way can mean death for the patient. In *Notes on Surgery for Nurses*, an 1887 handbook, Dr. Joseph Bell writes of how the trained nurse must react to the 'Unexpected':

> Try first to get over your fear of it; nothing is too apt to unnerve a lay person—even a nurse, and even still worse, a doctor—than an unexpected gush of blood with its contaminants of fear and fainting. Try to remember, I always tell the students, that every visible bleeding can be stopped, for a time at least, till help comes if you do not lose your heads; and above all, if you insist on seeing it—look at it, do not cover it up: if you try to conceal it by piling on cloths, wadding handkerchiefs, and the like, they will be soaked, the bleeding will be encouraged, and the patient may die. Look at it, try to trace it to its source, and then put your finger on the place it comes from […]. If it is a shattered limb from which the blood is oozing, get at the artery above the wound and compress it.[49]

Spoken like a command, the instruction here is clear. The nurse must remain calm and focus solely, and intently, on the wound; 'Look at it', he repeats, 'put your finger on [it]'. This detached language, along with its insistent focus on wounds, is mirrored in the professional nurse's diary. It is most often accompanied, furthermore, not with the popular rhetoric of propaganda, referencing 'heroes'

[49] Joseph Bell, *Notes on Surgery for Nurses* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1887), pp. 64-65.

and 'noble sacrifice'—as is frequently the VADs—but rather, with personal pride at having done the job well, at having kept her 'head'.

This professional, detached focus also functioned in securing a sense of the professional boundary between nurse and patient, a boundary that protects medical professionals from being overwhelmed; viewing the patient on the table as a wound, a problem to be solved or contained, and not as a feeling and suffering individual, allows for a kind of detached focus, necessary in order to maintain the self-control and objectivity thought to be crucial to making both accurate clinical decisions and precise surgical movements.[50] The cultivated skills of accuracy, focused detail, as well as the calm and detached demeanour on which they depend, is a frequent source of intense professional pride for the nurse. Indeed, discipline is of vital importance not only to the fighting soldier, but also to the professional nurse. In fact, the significance of discipline in the nurse's training, as described in nursing texts, reads not unlike an officer's training manual. O'Neil and Barnett's text, *Our Nurses*, published in 1889, for example, states:

> [The Nurse] must be perfectly disciplined to bear fatigue and discomfort, to endure painful sights or unpleasant smells, to act in unison with others, and not on the erratic impulses of the moment—in a word, her body must be her faithful servant, and her duty its wise controller.[51]

This language of—and professional demand for—discipline, endurance, strength, control, and self-sacrifice influenced how the professional nurse viewed her role; it impacted how she defined both success and failure; it often lent both tone and shape to the narratives she transcribed, as well as to the identity she depicts, repairs, and re-asserts in her personal diary. At times, through its pages, she sought to highlight and preserve moments of professional confirmation—'only the Sisters with nerve, experience and sound judgement are any good here'.[52] At others, as we shall see, its pages are

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[50] Nancy R. Angoff, 'Making a Place for Emotions in Medicine', *Yale Journal of Health Policy, Law, and Ethics* 2.2 (2002), p. 447.
[51] H.C. O'Neill and Edith A. Barnett, *Our Nurses and the Work They Have to Do* (London: Ward, Lock & Co., 1989), p. 21.
[52] Luard, diary, 5 April 1917, *Women in the War zone*, p. 318.

used to navigate a sense of failure and fragmentation. I will turn now to an examination of the diary's various and overlapping functions for the frontline nurse. In the midst of the hospital's intermittent chaos, the diary was a rare, private site of refuge and control. In its pages, the nurse could find distraction as well as cathartic release. She could also, during moments of rest, navigate, repair, and reassert her professional identity as healer. For the purposes of clarity, the sections that follow are divided under subheadings, each concentrating on a particular function of the diary and its role in aiding in the navigation, repair and maintenance of the nurse's professional identity.

II. 'What nobler death could one wish for [?]': narration, navigation, and the reassertion of meaning[53]

In *Fighting Forces, Writing Women*, Sharon Ouditt argues that personal accounts of nursing that began with enthusiastic declarations to serve 'typically [became] dominated by images of alienation, dislocation and even madness'.[54] This is undoubtedly true in the published, autobiographical texts of Irene Rathbone, Mary Borden, and Evadne Price—the primary source material for many, if not most, studies of First World War nursing experience and representation, including that of Ouditt. However, for women writing amidst the chaos of the war itself—and without plans for publication—the story is more complex. While there are, without question, countless passages in wartime nursing diaries that reflect feelings of profound alienation or 'mental fragmentation', other pages, very often within the same diary, present moments where meaning is reasserted.[55] This is often done through drawing on the idealistic and abstract rhetoric that was used at the start of the war—'what nobler death could one wish for?', writes Nurse Notley in March of 1918.[56] 'Today was

[53] Miss M.C.D. Notley, diary, 22 March 1918, IWM Documents.
[54] Sharon Ouditt, *Fighting Forces, Writing Women: Identity and Ideology in the First World War* (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 37
[55] Ouditt, *Fighting Forces*, p. 38.
[56] Miss M.C.D. Notley, diary, 22 March 1918, IWM Documents. 15305 (06/100/1).

hard work', writes Dorothea Crewdson, 'Another convoy of poor, tired, wounded warriors'.[57] There is a tension here being both enacted and navigated in the diary. The professional nurse is caught between a growing sense of frustration, despair, and exhaustion with the war's futility and a desire to recognize the value and dignity of male sacrifice. The latter is intimately connected to her perception of her professional identity. As argued by Carol Acton, '[t]o admit to the absurdity and insanity of two groups of men trying to take out each other's holes in the ground is also to question her role in the process of their healing'.[58] At moments where anxiety, stemming from this tension, is acute, the use of idealized, abstract language can act as a kind of shield, protecting the nurse's sense of professional identity, while also recognizing and/or commemorating the suffering, and dying, of combatant men. Both psychodynamic and cognitive models of trauma theory and therapy argue for the importance of developing 'a cognitively *meaningful* trauma narrative'; indeed, for some, even core beliefs must be changed 'in order to accommodate an explanatory account'.[59] On 6 November 1915, after the death of her 'poor little abdominal boy', Nurse Appleton writes of telling him what an 'honour [it is] to be wounded as he has'.[60] In the midst of diary that is often overt in its expression of frustration and rage at the senseless damage war inflicts on men's bodies, such reassertions of meaning can appear incongruous and contradictory. They speak, however, to their writer's complex subject position, a position she examines and attempts to navigate on the pages of her diary. I will turn now, to a consideration of the diary's function in moments where meaning cannot be found.

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[57] Crewdson, diary, 18 July 1915, p. 17.
[58] Carol Acton, *Grief in Wartime: Private Pain, Public Discourse* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 140.
[59] Debra Kaminer, 'Healing Processes in Trauma Narratives: A Review', *South African Journal of Psychology* 36.3 (2006), p. 489. J.L. Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (London: Pandora, 1992), p. 178.
[60] Appleton, 6 November 1915, p.73.

III. 'Her heart is dead. She killed it': the diary, distancing, dissociation, and divestment[61]

In *Containing Trauma*, Christine Hallett reminds her reader that while recent scholarship has challenged the war's supposed futility and mass disillusion, its extreme destructiveness remains unquestionable; 'the blasting with heavy artillery, the relentlessness of machine-gun fire, and the focused efforts of snipers were designed to cause maximum damage. Their purpose was to obliterate the human being'.[62] The extreme damage these relentless and proficient machines inflicted on the male body cannot be overstated. Mangled and broken, wounded men were transported to casualty clearing stations or field hospitals where they were quickly triaged, often by an experienced nurse. Mary Borden provides a succinct description of triage. 'It was my business', she writes in *The Forbidden Zone*, 'to sort out the wounded as they were brought in from the ambulances and to keep them from dying before they got to the operating rooms: it was my business to sort out the nearly dying from the dying'.[63] In such roles, the nurse came into direct, repeated contact with men's often gruesome injuries. 'The wounds were frightful', writes Miss Mary Notley in her diary, 'I'd never seen anything like it […]. The 2nd night I was on I had 2 deaths, one a head case and the other a chest case. The Orderly was too busy to help me, and having [l]aid the [p]atient out, I was dressing his wound (head) and nearly all his brains fell out on the pillow […]'.[64] The repeated, and often prolonged, witnessing (and handling) of such horrific wounds was profoundly traumatizing, frequently resulting in, if not demanding, dissociative protection. In his foundational 1901 work, entitled *The Mental State of Hystericals,* Pierre Janet first identified 'dissociation' of traumatic events from consciousness as a fundamental defence against overwhelming experience. This dissociation,

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[61] Borden, 'Moonlight', *The Forbidden Zone*, p. 43.
[62] Christine Hallett, *Containing Trauma: Nursing Work in the First World War* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2009), p. 3.
[63] Borden, 'Blind', *The Forbidden Zone*, p. 95.
[64] Notley, diary, 22 March 1918, IWM Documents 15305 (06/100/1).

often taking the form of a detached numbness, allows the individual to psychologically (if temporarily) escape from the emotional and physical distress caused by war.[65]

On the written page, this dissociation can take the form of a detached, or emotionless tone, a tone not entirely different from the language of professional detachment espoused in medical training. At other moments, it elicits a kind of silencing (or avoidance) of any focus on the traumatic sights witnessed. '[I]t is too awful to speak about', writes Nurse Notley in October 1918.[66] 'I give up trying to describe it. It beats me', states an overwhelmed Nurse Appleton in July 1916.[67] 'Men very bad. Had several deaths', succinctly writes Miss E. Smith in March 1917, further description being either impossible, or avoided, in order to shield the self. She can 'carry on' aiding the men under her care, by avoiding, or distancing herself, from the trauma and its emotional impact.

In contrast, for other diarists the blank page is a site of release, confession, and unburdening. Far from a site of avoidance, these diaries present a catalogue of horrors. Located just behind the line during the third battle of Ypres, an exhausted and 'dazed' nurse Luard writes in her diary:

> 16 August 1917
>
> I feel dazed with going round the rows of silent or groaning wrecks and arranging for room for more in the night […]. Many die and their beds are filled instantly. One has got so used to their dying that it conveys no impression beyond a vague sense of medical failure. You forget entirely that they were once civilian, that they were alive and well yesterday, that they have wives and mothers and fathers and children at home; all you realise if that they are dead soldiers, and there are thousands of others. It is all very like a battlefield.[68]

Luard's diary here presents a kind of detached, professional focus, one that demands a concentration on wounds and the body as an object, not as a subject, or individual—'you forget entirely that they were once civilian […] that they have wives and mothers and fathers'. In such moments, the diary serves several overlapping functions. The habitual practice of documenting the day's events, lending

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[65] Pierre Janet, *The Mental State of Hystericals: A Study of Mental Stigmata and Mental Accidents* (Fredrick: University publications of America, 1901)
[66] Notley, 7 October 1918.
[67] Appleton, 6 July 1916, p. 162.
[68] Luard, 16 August 1917, *Women in the War zone*, p. 327.

them some semblance of order through transcription, is perhaps a small comfort. At other times, the nurse's diary becomes a kind of repository, a site where the countless deaths and traumas she witnesses can at least be transcribed, and thereby granted some small form of recognition and memorialization—this in an environment where there is little, if any, time to mourn or express grief. The diary of Elsie Fenwick, for example, consistently takes the form of relentless listing of wounds and deaths. There is very little self-reflection in these entries, whether due to time constraints or, as we have seen, necessitated detachment or dissociation. On 28 April 1918, Fenwick writes, 'So busy, no time to think. We've got a man with a bullet in his brain and he lies all day unconscious and they are leaving him to see what happens. Another had his leg cut off at the hip joint today. I had to hold him. They cut him just as if he was a joint of meat.'[69] Such entries also appear to serve as site of divestment. Like Nurse Appleton in the diary's opening passage, Fenwick here perhaps too finds some sense of relief in the act—or action—of transcription. In committing the traumatic sight or experience to the written page, the writer in a sense removes, or separates, it from herself. In Lejeune's words, 'the function of expression is dissociated from the function of memory—one can even say it is tied to the function of forgetting.'[70]

The diary, however, is also a potentially dangerous space in this context. As a genre that encourages introspection, it can pose a threat to the psychic and/or professional shield, as it threatens to dismantle the distancing mechanism. Indeed, the writing or narrating of an event encourages a confrontation; it invites consideration of personal impact, along with considerations of how the present moment relates to the past/impacts the future. A sudden return to the subjective, to the personal—to once more seeing patients as individuals 'who were alive and well yesterday'—can shatter the professional protective shield, and the nurse's psyche along with it. In *The Forbidden*

[69] Ibid., 28 April 1915, p. 134.
[70] Phillippe Lejeune, 'How Do Diaries End?', *On Diary*, p. 194.

Zone, Mary Borden considers this sudden fragmentation: 'I was awake now, and seemed to be breaking to pieces'.[71]

IV. A temporary escape from the professional identity: the diary and transcribing moments of rest.

'no time for me or such things as diaries. If there were,
I would just say how pretty the sea and sky are this morning—blue and copper!'[72]

Not unlike the soldier, the frontline nurse also uses her diary as a vehicle for both distraction and creative expression. In these moments, imagination, fantasy, and memory re-enter the diary as connections are drawn to the familiar, the mundane, and the beautiful. These entries, generally written when the diarist is removed from the primary site of trauma, are often more descriptive and calm in tone. Here the voice of the civilian takes precedence in the diary, as the nurse temporarily escapes the demands of her professional role. The hospital's exacting language of accumulating times, numbers, and wounds is here temporarily relinquished. There is a turn, instead, toward the natural, the simple, and/or the mundane—'had the most sumptuous meal […] washed down with lemonade', writes Crewdson at the end of a restful day.[73] Time, in moments of rest, appears to slow for the nurse. As control is regained, there is less of a need to repeatedly punctuate the diary with specific times—a gesture of control; 'It is now 3.45 a.m. and the day will soon be here again. The invalid […] is still alive', writes Crewdson in the midst of her night shift.[74]

In the early morning hours of 7 March 1916, after the previous day's 'Convoy, cold and horrid headache', Sister Appleton is compelled to capture the simple, natural beauty of the wintery morning before re-entering the frantic hospital:

> Slept through the first bell but woke at the second—to find my room aglow with a beautiful pink light. The outside world was a foot deep under snow. Telephone wires look like those fluffy bell pulls, about three inches in snow, and all glittering in the early morning sunshine. Truly beautiful and

[71] Borden, 'Blind', *The Forbidden Zone*, p. 103.
[72] Appleton, 27 August 1918, p. 245.
[73] Crewdson, 30 April 1915, p. 120.
[74] Ibid., 25 September 1915, p. 48.

> unwarlike. Now I must quickly dress or I shall be late for breakfast, but by tonight if the snow thaws I may forget what the morning was like, as there is plenty every day to drive out all thoughts but patients, wards lists … and convoys.[75]

Appleton here uses the diary to freeze time, perhaps so that this peaceful moment can be captured and revisited, along with any feelings of peace or restoration the 'unwarlike' scene might inspire. The diary, argues Lejeune, allows the individual 'to build a memory out of paper, to create archives from lived experience, to accumulate traces, prevent forgetting [and] to give life the consistency and continuity it lacks'.[76] Indeed, Appleton's descriptive language—a stark contrast to her frequently exacting and perfunctory style—suggests a desire to hold onto a fleeting moment of quiet, civilian peace. The same instinct is similarly present in several of the sketches she traces in her diary. On 30 January 1916, for example, she carefully draws what she calls '[t]he one fishing boat' on the water, complete with the gradual movement of a duck that floats alongside; 'going, going, gone', she writes playfully of the duck's progress. This sketch, not unlike the detailed description of the pink lit wintery scene, captures a small piece of the everyday in the midst of war.[77]

The ellipses of the entry's final line should also be noted. The diary, as we have seen, offers a rare space of control. The diarist can choose what to include and, conversely, what to omit or avoid. In choosing to capture—and thus make permanent and whole the scene of untouched beauty—Nurse Appleton, whether consciously or not, avoids marring the peaceful 'unwarlike' moment with whatever might be signified by those ellipses—gruesome wounds, cries, blood and death. In her diary, Dorothea Crewdson similarly seeks to capture a restful moment, and perhaps through meticulous transcription, extend its restorative effects. The entry, among the diary's longest, is highly detailed, its adjectives and pastoral images compounding:

> [W]ithout thought set off towards the world of fresh green that looked so alluring in the distance. Was well worth the extra tramping when I got there. Found a little by-path and followed it up some way into a maze of dried bracken and small trees and undergrowth and there lay down full length.

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[75] Appleton, 7 March 1916, p. 108
[76] Lejeune, 'How Do Diaries End?', *On Diary*, p. 195.
[77] Appleton, 7 March 1916, p. 108

> Had a delicious repose, barring the flies. Ate an orange to appease pangs of thirst and after a bit I wandered on my way and, having picked a huge bunch of most lovely wild hyacinths in the forest nearby, arrived finally at Madeleine. Wished so many times that I could have painted the scenes I saw as I came along. The colonies of bluebells under the trees, the blue sky above, the colours of the village and farm—indeed of the whole country in sunshine and shadow—were so delighting to an artistic eye.[78]

Through such highly detailed description Crewdson both captures and extends her temporary escape from the demands of her professional role and identity as nurse. It is telling that the entry also includes a detailed sketch, not only of the beautiful, secluded scene, but also of herself within it. Crewdson thus literally captures and preserves an image of herself as civilian, her identity as nurse being temporarily divested.

In providing a venue for such meticulous depictions of the restful, the beautiful, and the peaceful, the diary grants both Appleton and Crewdson with an opportunity to internally focus, to fulfil, in some small way, *their own* want or desire, rather than that of their patients. 'I may forget what the morning was like, as there is plenty every day to drive out all thoughts but patients, ward lists … and convoys', writes Appleton. In this moment, by virtue of its internalized addressee and malleable form, the blank page elicits a turn inward, a moment of potential self-care—this, in an environment that relentlessly demands self-sacrifice and self-abnegation.[79] The diary, in short, grants the nurse temporary escape from the demands and performance of her professional identity.

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[78] Crewdson, 30 April 1915, pp. 119-120.

[79] The diary of M.B. Peterkin provides a clear portrait of the seemingly constant demands placed on the nurse during major battles; 'we had convoys in every day, sometimes twice a day, & often at night as well, […] work[ing] at full pressure till the early hours of the morning, then back to bed for a couple of hours, & on again the next morning as usual. It was killing work, especially as most of the cases were pretty bad ones, (including a lot with gas poisoning) and we were often dressing from 9 or 10 in the morning till 4 or 5 in the afternoon, practically without a break. As for the theatre, it was in use night & day. When the rush was at its worst, they recorded 42 operations in 48 hours, which is not bad'. IWM, Documents. 7058 (77/60/1).

V. The diary and the reassertion and repair of the professional identity

In *The Body in Pain*, Elaine Scarry asserts that the object world recedes when the physical body is severely traumatized. 'Intense pain', she writes, is 'world-destroying'.[80] A man who has spoken fervently of the woman he loves, will, upon traumatic injury, 'become so irrecoverably remote' that he will reject even the opportunity to say his final farewell to her.[81] She demonstrates this through highlighting the loss of both 'world and self' in a Sartre story of political imprisonment:

> The world grows light, as though all else has been upended and emptied of its contents. What was full is now an outline, a sketch, a caricature. Spain and anarchy, dramatic realities a few days earlier, are now without immediacy and meaning […] This loss of country and conviction is only one of many signs of weightlessness of world and self […] Even the physical objects in his prison cell, the most immediate and concrete objects of consciousness, have been emptied of their content, have become a mere sketch: bench, lamp, and coal pile […] had "a funny look: they were more obliterated, less dense than usual".[82]

The innumerable components of self, of individual consciousness—memories, affections, cultural values, political convictions—are here rendered 'weightless' by extreme trauma. A man loses himself to the absoluteness of physical pain, a pain that cannot be communicated or fully understood, as it, in Scarry's words, 'does not simply resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned'.[83] This loss of self to incommunicable pain is a constant in war. Indeed, war's weapons are designed to cause maximum damage to human flesh. Men, if not killed outright, are often reduced to parts and pieces. The First World War's hospitals and casualty clearing stations, as we have seen, were filled with the incomprehensible sounds of wounded men. Medical staff are first charged with containment of wounds. The damaged part of the body is the primary focus. Once control of the physical is achieved, and pain reduced, it is the nurse's job to aid in the gradual return of the individual. Indeed, she is charged with retrieval of the 'weightless' self, a task achieved

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[80] Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford UP, 1985), p. 29
[81] Ibid., 31.
[82] Ibid., 31-32.
[83] Ibid., 4.

through seemingly insignificant quotidian acts. These simple, seemingly mundane tasks—the collection of flowers for the ward, the giving of a cup of tea, choosing a song on the gramophone—are frequently and meticulously described in the nurse's diary, as are the combatant's positive responses to them. Through carefully documenting these moments the nurse reasserts the value of her professional role. These are her success stories, stories that when intermittently transcribed alongside passages describing wounds and death reflect a kind of balance, even amid the hospital's chaos. 'Queer existence this with such ups and downs of work', writes Dorothea Crewdson on 15 October 1915.[84] Indeed, a common feature of nursing diaries, for example, are vivid descriptions of preparations for, or combatant enjoyment of, traditional holidays or festivities—Christmas, Valentines, Sunday 'roasts'. 'was up at 6.15am. […] doing up some stockings for the boys', writes Sister Kathleen Mann on 25 December 1915, 'I think the men quite enjoyed it'.[85] In these entries, the diary's pages contain few references to wounds. Rather, there are individuals. Indeed, combatants are more frequently named and their specific words and gestures are described in detail. The nurse's role, unique in its traversing into more 'domestic tasks' and considerations, renders such passages particularly significant. They are not merely descriptions of 'daily life' on the hospital floor, but small reassertions of the nurse's role as healer. Indeed, they reflect—and allow her time to mediate upon—her successful cases. They also illuminate her role in repairing the minds, as well as the bodies, of men. Their subtle accumulation marks the gradual return of the 'world', which the war's violence and trauma had 'destroyed'.[86] For the nurse, it restores value and meaning to her professional role. 'I took my lace pillow and sat beside [a patient] this afternoon', writes Sister Appleton, '—he liked it very much and hated me to move, even to get things for him. At three, I made him a feeder of tea with brandy in, he said it was *very* good and wanted me to have some of it,

[84] Crewdson, diary, 15 October 1915, p. 56.
[85] Sister Kathleen Mann, diary, 25 December 1915, *Women in the War zone*, p. 225.
[86] Scarry, p. 29

but I refused'.[87] At times, the restoration of the quotidian causes the nurse's role to cross with that of mother, sister, or wife, posing a threat to the boundaries dictated by the nurses' professional medical scripts. The tensions are very often navigated through their being written. 'He pressed me', continues Appleton, 'and he was making himself breathless over it, so I did drink some from the back of the feeder, which pleased him'. Such tensions, however, did not seem to dissuade nurses from their frequent attempts to restore small elements of the 'everyday' for their patients. Their frequent depiction on the diary page makes this clear. Simultaneously, these entries also allow the nurse to reassert the value of her professional identity as healer. They provide, in other words, some sense of balance, amid the hospital's chaos and death. I will turn now to the chapter's final section, examining the nurse's diary and the navigation of death and grief.

V. The diary and the navigation of death

'[W]hat can be done to soothe the entrance into the dark valley'.

Eva C.E. Luckes, *Hospital Sisters and Their Duties*, 1912.[88]

The dying patient, perhaps more than any other, challenges the nurse's professional identity. Death in medicine is framed as failure. It is what the medical professional is trained to 'battle' against. 'Physicians are warriors whose most special calling is to defeat death on its own ground', argues Judy Segal.[89] This tying of death to war is common in the nurse's professional behavioral scripts. Late-nineteenth and early twentieth-century nursing texts frequently narrate medicine's approach to death in terms of battle— '[n]ursing is a warzone, and the nurses are soldiers'; 'we must command the vessels'; '[y]ou must be on your guard'.[90] In this framing, death of the patient is a fight lost. In the

[87] Appleton, 29 October 1915, p. 69.
[88] Eva C.E Luckes, *Hospital Sisters and Their Duties*, p.158.
[89] Judy Z. Segal, 'Contesting Death, Speaking of Dying', *Journal of Medical Humanities* 21.1 (2000), p. 30.
[90] H.C. O'Neill and Edith A. Barnett, *Our Nurses and the Work They Have To Do*, p. 14; Joseph Bell, *Notes on Surgery for Nurses*, p. 67, 78.

aftermath of this failure, the battle-worn nurse is encouraged to find comfort and solace in its relative rarity when compared to those she has 'won'. 'Fortunately, this sad side of her work', assures Matron Eva Luckes in 1912, 'is by no means that which claims the largest share of her time and attention'.[91] This, as we know, was not the case for the First World War nurse. 'More dying men all day', writes K.E. Luard in her diary in August 1917.[92] The daily trauma she experienced in the face of men's gruesome wounds, coupled with a compounding sense of failure at not being able to contain them, could overwhelm the frontline nurse. Furthermore, in peacetime, when a hospitalized patient does die, it is in a sterile environment. This is particularly the case if death occurs in the operating room, a room of regimented order and cleanliness. All surfaces, as well as the patient's wound, 'require very thorough cleansing'.[93] Nursing manuals generally devote entire chapters to the vital importance of the operating room's order and cleanliness, which the nurse was charged with ensuring and maintaining. Death, in this context, with the aid of greater time, space, and equipment, is, in itself, sanitized; its general messiness is contained, at least in part, by the hospital's rigid organization and its demand for extreme order; '[C]leanliness may be looked at as matter in its right place', writes H.C. O'Neill and Edith Barnett in *Our Nurses.*[94]

If a patient's death is prolonged, though impending, family and friends are often present, lending emotional support to the dying man. There is also an order, schedule, and protocol that grants medical staff adequate time between cases; this ensures the necessary space to potentially process and navigate any personal feelings of failure that may be associated with a patient's death. These medical procedures, protocols, and conditions—to which the professional nurse was accustomed—were very often rendered impossible in war. Indeed, in the war's makeshift

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[91] Eva C.E. Luckes, *Hospital Sisters*, p. 162
[92] Luard, 17 August 1917, *Women in the War zone,* p. 327.
[93] H.C. O'Neill and Edith A. Barnett, *Our Nurses*, p. 118.
[94] Ibid., p. 118.

hospitals—converted casinos, tents, trains, and ships—death was extremely common, and profoundly messy. 'The men are brought in with mud over their eyes and mouths, and 126 have died in 3 and a half days', writes Nurse Luard in August 1917. In this environment, the nurse stationed at the Casualty Cleaning Station (CSS), in particular, does not have time to get to know her patients personally. There is also little time, in the run of a frantic day, to rest and/or reflect. Peacetime protocols and procedures, which depend upon the timely arrival of emergency patients to hospital, were also a rare occurrence. 'These poor wounded men have been two days on their journey, with only first-aid dressings, some with tourniquet. One had both legs off'.[95] The fact that such wounds, which, if seen and treated sooner by hospital staff, might not have been fatal, was profoundly troubling to the professional nurse not yet accustomed to war's conditions. 'It seems so absurd to keep hospitals partly shut up away down here, when they are so badly needed nearer the front'.[96] These conditions, combined with the extreme and terrifying proficiency of war's weapons, meant that the nurse was witness to countless deaths. Indeed, at times, as we have seen, these deaths seemed to compound, melding together in the mind of the exhausted nurse, who must frequently dissociate herself in order to nurse. When the nurse was granted rest, however, she often turned to her diary to grieve and memorialize, and, in turn, to once again reassert her professional identity in the face of a mounting sense of failure.

Amongst the longest entries in the diary of Sister Edith Appleton are those that centre on death. Starkly different in style and tone from those written under the exacting pressure of the moment, these entries seek to reclaim individuals from the previous day's (or week's) compounding wounds. When it becomes clear, for example, that one particular patient will die—a patient with whom she has grown close, writing frequently to his mother—he is no longer referred to as her

[95] Miss. M.B. Peterkin, diary, n.d. August 1914, IWM, Documents. 7058 (77/60/1).
[96] Ibid., 18 September 1914.

'pneumonia boy', but rather, by his name, 'poor Kerr'.[97] In the days leading up to his death, even those that leave her little time to rest, she is nonetheless compelled to write of him. The entry for 10 March 1916 reads:

> Very big day, as a convoy arrived at 7.40—590 men, chiefly sick and only about 30 badly wounded. The greater part were such things as trench-foot. Poor Kerr is worse and I am sure that boy has been gassed and will die. I shouldn't be surprised to find his cot empty when I go on duty. His poor mother—how will she take it.[98]

The professional distance that is both expected of—and, at times, necessary to the functioning of—the nurse is here relinquished. The diary allows her to cross the professional barrier so that she may pre-emptively grieve, and prepare herself for his death. Furthermore, the space granted to Kerr in an entry that began as a succinct summary of her busy day is telling. It seems that even in the midst of the 590 men admitted to the hospital on this 'very big day', it is Kerr who is of most pressing concern. The line 'I shouldn't be surprised to find his cot empty when I go on duty' betrays her fear and anxiety. In imagining what she dreads, she perhaps hopes to somehow lessen its emotional impact. On 12 March, the next entry, she transcribes Kerr's death, or, more accurately speaking, how she desires to remember his death. It is here, through narrative's offer of order and control, that the nurse both expresses and navigates her overlapping feelings of grief, guilt, sorrow, and relief. It is also through this narrative—its inclusions and omissions—that Nurse Appleton reasserts and reclaims her professional identity:

> 12 March
>
> Too much sadness to write about, besides being dead beat. My poor little boy Kerr died today. He had been in 15 days, suffering from gas, pneumonia, bronchitis—and has been extremely and dangerously ill all the time, but only the day before yesterday he realized that he was not going to get well. I am glad to say we never left him night or day, and he was fond of us all. He kept whispering all sorts of messages for home and his fiancée—then he would call, 'Sister', and when I bent down to hear, 'I do love you. When I'm gone, will you kiss me?' All the time heads would be popping in making demands, 'The sergeant wants to know if you can lend him a couple of men to…' But in spite of it all, I did kiss the boy—first for his mother and then for myself—which pleased him. Then he whispered, 'But you still will, when I'm gone…' The night before he asked me what dying would

[97] Appleton, 12 March 1916 p. 110.
[98] Ibid., p. 110.

> be like, and said it seemed so unsatisfactory. He felt too young to die, and him not even wounded, but just with bronchitis. […]. Thank goodness, what I told him dying would be like happened exactly—a clear gift of Providence. I told him it would be that, little by little, his breathing would get easier, he would feel tired and want to go to sleep, and then he would just sleep, with no morphia. That is exactly what happened, without a struggle. He was quite conscious up to 20 minutes before he died. I just asked him now and then if he knew I was still with him. He said, "Yes", so I asked, "…and you're quite happy, aren't you?" He distinctly said, "yes, quite." Then the last and very trying part was to walk along to the other end of the village beside the poor dead thing, to see him decently put in the mortuary, all with hundreds of French eyes turned 'full on'. Our own people always clear out of the way when they see a mortuary case coming.[99]

The narrating of this individual death is here both an act of navigation and memorialization. In naming the 'boy', the reasons for—and conditions of—his death, along with his final thoughts and words, she retrieves him from the war's anonymity. In claiming Kerr from the mass of seemingly compounding parts and pieces—the other chest cases, the abdominals, the gangrenes—she restores his dignity and his individuality. In doing so, she, in turn, validates and reasserts her identity as healer. In this narrative, Nurse Appleton centres on her role and actions in ensuring that Kerr's death is 'a good death'. It reaffirms that she has indeed done 'everything' she could—a vague (and idealized) professional demand made on the nurse. Nurse Appleton's summative phrases—'I'm glad to say we never left him night or day'—along with her direct quoting of his comfort, appreciation, and love further reaffirms and provides reassurance and comfort to the diarist. "'You're quite happy, aren't you?" He distinctly said, "Yes, quite'". The word 'distinctly' here betrays a keen desire. Appleton is desperate to convince herself that she had indeed done all she could.

The diary is here once again a site for the navigation of tension and anxiety. Kerr's whispering of 'I do love you', and his request for a kiss is troubling for Nurse Appleton. Her intimate contact with the young, dying soldier causes her professional identity to cross with that of both mother and lover, leaving her to seek coherence and reassertion in the diary's pages. Indeed,

[99] Ibid., pp. 110-111.

her anxiety is clear—'all the time heads would be popping in making demands'. And yet, in spite of this, she acquiesces—'I did kiss the boy', an action she is compelled to confess in her diary.

Finally, the entry, in turn, functions as a rehearsal space. In her duties as nurse, Appleton must also write to Kerr's mother, for whom, in the hospital, she has 'stood in for' as a kind of surrogate. This letter, undoubtedly difficult to write, is here mapped out, and made coherent, though its being first composed and framed in the private diary. In their diaries, nurses frequently speak of the anxiety, pity, and frustration arising from this task. These letters, meant to both inform and ensure those at home of their son or husband's 'comfortable' or 'peaceful' passing, speak to the closeness of the nurse to both her patients and their deaths. A 1918 letter, written by an unknown nursing Matron to a mother provides an example:

> Dear Mrs. Simpson,
>
> You will have heard the sad news that your son Pte. Joseph Simpson passed away on Tuesday Nov: 12th. The Funeral is taking place today at […] cemetery. The no. of his grave is E Plot 10. We would have liked to have had you with him, but when we saw he was acutely ill, there was no time to get you here. He passed away peacefully at 5-52 pm. on Tuesday Nov 12th He talked of going to Blighty to see you & then before he died he thought he was with you all & put out his hands to first one & and then the other with such a glad smile, he called you by name & then "Ada", but we could not catch what else he said. He was a merry good patient we did all we could for him & he had everything that was possible.
>
> With sincere sympathies
> Yours faithfully
>
> E. Boon
> […] Matron.[100]

This letter, kind, detailed, and intimate, speaks to the nurse's proximity to death in the frontline hospital. Frequently charged with caring for, and guiding, men in their final moments, she was witness to their final words and gestures; she fulfilled their final requests. In these charged moments, the nurse's professional identity crosses with that of mother, spouse, sister, or friend, a crossing that,

[100] 'Letter from a nurse describing the death of a soldier', November 1918, IWM, Misc 262, Item 3562.

at times, evokes entwined feelings of shame, love, relief, sadness, and grief. The diary, in the aftermath of these moments, can offer a site for navigation and reassertion of the nurse's professional identity. It can also, as we have seen, offer her a private space to grieve, to memorialize, and to mourn. I will turn now to the Conclusion, where I will consider life-writing's function at the war's official close: The Armistice.

CONCLUSION

'AS WE STEP OUT OF THE THEATRE': THE ARMISTICE, THE DIARY, AND LIFE-WRITING AT THE CLOSE[1]

On 11 November 1918, Mrs. Ethel Bilborough writes the final entry of her war diary,

> **PEACE!** The armistice is signed, "the day" has come at last! [A]nd—it is ours! Every heart is vibrating to the wonderful song of Triumph […]. The war is *over*. And *we have won* the war, and glory, honour and victory is ours. […] Today has been a truly wonderful day and I'm glad I was alive to see it! I was trying to write a coherent letter this morning […] when all of sudden the air was rent by a tremendous BANG!! My instant thought was—a raid! […] But when another great explosion shook the windows […] I knew that this was no raid, but that the signing of the Armistice had been accomplished.[2]

On the western front, nurse Edith Appleton is too occupied with her duties to even know the Armistice has occurred; the next day, however, she writes,

> Peace! Thank God for that! It feels very queer too, as if your elastic had snapped. Matron and I took some sick sisters to Abbeville yesterday, and the moment we stopped at the siding we were pounced upon by the ambulance driver and told we were much behind the times for not knowing the news.[3]

At an unknown date after the war, combatant Harry Drinkwater is compelled to close his diary with a description of the same day,

> At a few minutes to 11' o'clock on that morning, I was standing on the edge of the cliff overlooking the sea and awaiting any sign that would tell us that the war was at an end. Precisely to the minute of 11, maroons blew and coloured lights were fired from the boats in the harbour […].
>
> So peace had come at last.[4]

Whether written in the midst of the historic event, or sometime after it, each of these entries reveal a desire—or perhaps a need—to position one's self at the moment the Armistice was declared: I was writing a letter; I was nursing; I was standing on a cliff, waiting. Just as it did at the war's outset, the diary page here offers its writer a space of refuge and control, a space for the reassertion and

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[1] C.F. Harriss, diary, 11 November 1918, IWM, Documents. 14429 (67/87/1).
[2] Ethel M. Bilbrough, diary, 11 November 1918, *My War Diary, 1914-1918* (London: Ebury Press, 2014), pp. 133-139. emphasis in original.
[3] Sister Edith Appleton, diary, 12 November 1918, *A Nurse at the Front: The First World War Diaries of Sister Edith Appleton,* ed. by Ruth Cowen (London and New York: Simon and Schuster, 2012), p. 263.
[4] Harry Drinkwater, diary, no date, *Harry's War: The Great War Diary of Harry Drinkwater*, ed. by Jon Cooksey and David Griffiths (London: Ebury Press, 2013), p. 372.

preservation of identity—and this, at the close of a tumultuous four-year period of rapid change, sweeping propagandist claims, prolonged separations, unprecedented violence, and mass death. For this upper-middle-class civilian woman, the Armistice offers a final 'performance' of her wartime identity as Patriotic Woman, a role that she shaped, bolstered, and sought to preserve on the pages of her meticulous, scrapbook-style diary. In stark contrast, for the still serving nurse and the convalescent soldier—recently re-classified as A1, fit for duty—the Armistice undoubtedly evoked a range of entwined emotions: relief, joy, pride, exhaustion, ambivalence, sadness. As Nurse Appleton writes, 'Peace! Thank God for that! It feels very queer too, as if your elastic had snapped'. Their identities, now once more positioned somewhere between civilian and military, cannot yet, if ever, fully assimilate the traumatic experiences both witnessed and endured. And yet, they *can* at least find some sense of closure in the diary. Indeed, the need to mark not only the Armistice, but also their specific position—in place, time, and body—in relation to it, speaks to a desire for some sense of self-assertion and self-declaration at the close. These diarists, in other words, are compelled to mark the moment of their confirmed *survival*, whatever complex and overlapping feelings that fact may have inspired.

This thesis has examined a diverse collection of First World War letters and diaries, both published and archival, written between 1914 and 1918. It considered some of the functions of life-writing in wartime, highlighting the private, written page as a venue for self-creation and navigation, distraction and avoidance, fantasy and creativity, confession and cathartic release. In the war's early months, the diary and letter provided a safe space where public scripts could be tried out and rehearsed. The new recruit could find initial shape and definition for his newly militarised identity as heroic soldier. For both the middle-class civilian man and woman, living in a social context that positioned the 'khaki man as paramount', the diary could offer a place of refuge, a place to carve out

and justify alternate forms of patriotic citizenship and identity, even if just for themselves.[5] On the western front, the private, blank page offered some semblance of control, however fleeting. As the war's early public scripts—for both the heroic soldier and the self-sacrificing nurse—were challenged, broken, and eschewed in the midst of the frontline trenches and hospitals, the diary and letter were sites for the reassertion, maintenance, and repair of identity in the midst of chaos.

In closing, a thesis centring on life-writing's multifaceted functions in wartime would be remiss if it did not speak of the archive which catalogues, houses, and protects these private, intimate documents. Indeed, there is, in a sense, a transference of 'duty' here. The Imperial War Museum holds the diaries, letters, memoirs, photographs, and scrapbooks that have been largely donated by the descendants—nieces, nephews, children, and grandchildren—of the men and women who had lived (and died) during these four years of war. These donated documents and images, private and intimate, are charged. Handling them—the photograph and lock of child's hair kept in the breast pocket of Lieutenant Lansdowne, the meticulous scrapbook kept by nurse Marjorie Garrard, the lucky black cat brooch once held fast by a London soldier—make profoundly present the lived lives and bodies of the men and women who once held these objects.[6] The donation of these 'alive' and often fragile documents and objects can easily be imagined as a self-sacrificing act, perhaps one conducted out of a sense of 'duty', a desire to honour the dead. This 'transference' of duty, of passing on the tangible records of private life, is an act of both memorialization and hope, a hope that, in its most idealistic incarnation, we might prevent future wars from occurring.

In the early months of the project, I had sent letters to the holders of several soldiers' private documents, requesting permission to quote from these diaries and letters. In response, I received an

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[5] 'The Cult of Khaki', *The Times*, 16 March 1915, p. 13.

[6] Lieutenant G.B.A. Lansdowne, IWM, Documents. 14826; Miss M.H. Garrard, Scrapbook, IWM, Documents. (67/105/1); Black Cat Brooch, IWM, EPH 3477.

email from the nephew of one combatant, W.T Colyer. He had wanted to tell me briefly of how his uncle had lived after the war, how he had rewritten and added to his war diaries, how he had told cheerful, but honest, stories of the war, and how he had died, in part due to chest issues, a remnant, he said, of the damage done by the gas. This email, a poignant reminder of the continued significance—and presence—of the First World War in the lives of those descended from it, spoke to a second 'transference of duty'—for that of the researcher. Indeed, the historian was likely among those imagined by the 1914 diarist who opened her war diary with the words: 'It seems to me that everyone who happens to be alive in such stirring, epoch-making times, ought to write <u>something</u> of what is going on! Just think how interesting it would be to read in years hence!'.[7]

[7] Bilbrough, diary, 15 July 1915, p. 3. emphasis in original.

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